

LUXATING PATELLAS IN DOGS

Understanding Kneecap Dislocation, Diagnosis & Treatment

Patellar luxation (luxating patella) is a common orthopaedic condition in dogs where the kneecap (patella) slips out of its normal position. The condition may cause intermittent limping, skipping, pain, and arthritis over time.

Luxating patellas are common in small-breed dogs, but can affect dogs of any size. Early treatment can improve comfort and mobility.

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1 WHAT IS A LUXATING PATELLA?

The patella (kneecap) normally sits within a groove at the front of the knee joint.

A luxating patella occurs when the kneecap slips out of this groove. Luxations may be:

- Medial (towards the inside of the leg)
- Lateral (towards the outside of the leg)
- Mild or severe
- Present in one or both hind legs

Repeated luxation can lead to pain, cartilage damage, and arthritis.



5 HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

Your veterinarian may perform:

- Physical examination
- Orthopaedic assessment
- Patella grading
- Gait evaluation
- Radiographs (X-rays)
- Assessment for arthritis
- Evaluation for cruciate ligament disease

Patellar luxation is commonly graded from:

Grade 1	Patella luxates occasionally but returns easily.
Grade 2	Patella luxates regularly and may remain displaced briefly.
Grade 3	Patella remains displaced most of the time.
Grade 4	Patella is permanently displaced and cannot be manually replaced.

2 DID YOU KNOW?

- Patellar luxation is one of the most common orthopaedic conditions in small dogs.
- Some dogs show signs only occasionally.
- Many affected dogs are born with abnormal limb alignment.
- Arthritis can develop over time.
- Early intervention often improves long-term outcomes.



3 WHICH DOGS ARE MOST AT RISK?

Higher-risk breeds include:

- Cavalier King Charles Spaniels
- Pomeranians
- Chihuahuas
- Toy Poodles
- Yorkshire Terriers
- Maltese
- Jack Russell Terriers
- Boston Terriers
- French Bulldogs

Larger breeds can also develop patellar luxation.



4 RECOGNISE THE SIGNS

Common signs include:

- Skipping while walking
- Sudden hindlimb lameness
- Holding a leg up briefly
- Intermittent limping
- Clicking or popping sensations
- Difficulty jumping
- Reluctance to exercise
- Stiffness after rest
- Reduced activity levels

Many dogs will briefly carry the affected leg before returning to normal.



6 TREATMENT OPTIONS

Treatment depends on severity and clinical signs.



Conservative Management

- Weight management
- Exercise modification
- Joint supplements
- Anti-inflammatory medication
- Physiotherapy



Surgical Management

- Deepening the patellar groove
- Realigning the patellar tendon
- Soft tissue reconstruction
- Corrective bone procedures in severe cases

Surgery is often recommended for Grade 2-4 luxations causing pain or lameness.

7 RECOVERY & REHABILITATION

Successful recovery may require:

- Restricted exercise
- Lead walks only initially
- Physiotherapy
- Hydrotherapy
- Weight management
- Home rehabilitation exercises
- Follow-up examinations
- Repeat radiographs when required

Most dogs recover very well following surgery.



8 PREVENTION & JOINT HEALTH

You can help support joint health by:

- Maintaining healthy body weight
- Providing regular controlled exercise
- Avoiding obesity
- Using joint-support supplements when appropriate
- Seeking early assessment of limping
- Following veterinary recommendations

Although many luxating patellas are inherited, maintaining good joint health can improve long-term outcomes.



COMMON COMPLICATIONS

Osteoarthritis

Progressive joint degeneration may occur.



Cartilage Damage

Repeated luxation damages joint surfaces.



Chronic Pain

Long-standing instability can cause discomfort.



Cruciate Ligament Rupture

Dogs with luxating patellas have an increased risk of cruciate injury.



ADDITIONAL TIPS



Small breeds are most commonly affected.



Weight management significantly improves outcomes.



Rehabilitation can improve recovery and mobility.



Regular monitoring helps detect progression.



Most dogs enjoy excellent quality of life with appropriate treatment.



EVERY DOG COUNTS

If your dog skips, hops, intermittently limps, or occasionally carries a hind leg, arrange a veterinary examination.

Early diagnosis and appropriate treatment can help maintain comfort, mobility, and long-term joint health.

