METROPOLITAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATES®

METROPOLITAN VETERINARY URGENT CARE & SPECIALTY

Tarsal Luxation in Pets

A Guide to Hock Dislocation & Treatment

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If your dog or cat has experienced a traumatic injury one of the severe injuries that results from trauma is a tarsal luxation. The tarsus is a series of joints in the dog and cat hindlimb that are more commonly known as the ankle or hock. Tarsal luxation, seen in dogs and cats, most often occurs when a pet experiences impact trauma such as a vehicular trauma or has their foot caught prior to trying to run, placing high amounts of strain on the tarsus. This heavy strain can cause damage to the collateral ligaments (medial or lateral) or other support structures surrounding the joint, allowing the joint to extend beyond its naturally intended range of motion or fully luxate in severe cases.

Your pet's lameness may vary depending on the degree of structural damage and stability on their other limbs.

This guide is designed to help you understand what a tarsal luxation is, how it's diagnosed, how it's treated, and what to expect for your pet's recovery.

Signs and Diagnosis

The most apparent sign of this injury is lameness, though its severity can vary depending on the extent of the damage. To determine the exact nature of the injury, a veterinarian will perform a thorough diagnosis, which includes:

1. **Orthopedic Examination & Gait Evaluation**
2. **Radiographs (X-rays)** highlight the bones comprising the tarsus
3. **Stressed radiographs**, which can be performed to demonstrate widening of the joint space and instability.

Treatment Options for Tarsal Luxation

Non-surgical Treatment

In mild cases of hyperextension or subluxation, often those with discomfort but without high amounts of instability, treatment with a splint or brace may be possible.

- These devices provide stability to the tarsus during your pet's normal ambulation and allow the damaged structures to heal on their own.
- This healing typically comes in the form of scar tissue and can provide enough stability in mild cases for your pet to return to their normal activity.
- A splint or brace is typically worn for a period of 8-12 weeks but can vary depending on your pet's progress.

Surgical Treatment

For more severe injuries, surgery is often required to restore stability to the joint.

Ligament Reconstruction: In cases of moderate to severe instability only impacting one collateral ligament, the ligament can often be reconstructed or replaced with a synthetic ligament.

Tarsal Arthrodesis (Joint Fusion): In cases of severe instability or fracture, a tarsal arthrodesis is recommended. This procedure involves fusing of the tarsus using orthopedic plates and screws. With a fused tarsus, your pet's discomfort will be mitigated as there is no longer any abnormal motion in the joint. The lack of motion in the joint can sometimes cause a mechanical, or functional, lameness, but typically the procedure is well tolerated. Further details will be discussed during your consultation with the surgeon.

Consult with a Surgeon at MVUCS

Understanding the best path forward for your pet is crucial.

Further details about your pet's specific condition and a recommended treatment plan will be discussed during your consultation with the surgeon at MVUCS.