

Amputation

It's always scary to hear that your pet may need to have a limb removed, and there are a variety of reasons why your pet may require an amputation.

We see animals that may have experienced massive trauma to a limb that cannot be otherwise repaired to a functional state. Cancer can cause masses that are inside the bone or are too large to be removed from the skin or are deep in the muscle or other soft tissues. Sometimes, neurological damage renders a limb without sensation or use of muscles to properly move it after nerves have been damaged. These are all appropriate reasons to consider amputation.

Prior to surgery, we will make sure that there is a good chance that your pet will be able to function with the remaining 3 limbs. We do orthopedic and neurologic examinations to determine if your pet is a prime candidate for amputation. If your pet has minimal issues with the legs that are to remain, it is likely that they will respond well to an amputation. If your pet has severe diffuse arthritis and disc disease and has difficulty walking with the limbs that are to remain, then removal of the affected limb is unlikely to help improve your pet's quality of life. These issues will be discussed as we determine the best treatment for your pet.

When a forelimb is amputated, the entirety of the limb, including the scapula, is removed. This prevents the bony prominences of the scapula from causing problems like eroding through the skin (pressure sores) and atrophy of the muscles leaving the scapula's outline visible. A bandage is placed after surgery for a period of approximately 2 weeks to prevent the large incision from becoming infected or having fluid buildup under the skin causing a seroma.

When a rear limb is amputated, the hip joint is disarticulated to remove the femur entirely. Muscles are sutured over the pelvis to provide a cushion over the hip region. This prevents leaving a stump that might be traumatized or get in the way of movement.

If your pet's limb is amputated due to suspected cancer, and we are unsure of the exact diagnosis, the limb will likely be submitted for pathology to see what type of cancer is present so that further treatment may be directed. Sometimes, a biopsy is taken prior to surgery to help confirm that amputation is the best option.

Pets do incredibly well with amputations. They don't have a mental block against losing a limb, and often once their source of pain and discomfort is gone, they are quickly back to normal life. Most pet owners are surprised at just how well they recover in a 2-4 week period!