

Imping Little Dogs

The dislocating patella (kneecap) is an extremely common problem in small dogs. An owner typically notices a little skip in the dog's step. The dog may even run on three legs, holding one hind leg up, and then miraculously be back on four legs as if nothing has happened.

In fact, something has happened: the kneecap has slipped out of the smooth groove in which it normally rides up and down. It has slipped *medially*, which is to say towards the opposite leg. With the patella dislocated (or *luxated*) medially, the knee cannot extend properly and stays bent. Hopefully, the patient will be able to slip the kneecap back where it belongs and be back to normal in only a few steps. For some dogs, getting a kneecap back where it belongs and normal extension of the rear leg is a mere dream only attainable with surgical correction.

Approximately 50% of affected dogs have both knees involved while the other 50% has only one knee involved. It is not a good thing to have one's knee cap out of place; the entire weight-bearing stress of the rear leg is altered which, in time, leads to changes in the hips, long bones, and ultimately arthritis. How severe the changes are depends on how severe the luxation is and how long it has been going on. In time, the legs will actually turn inward, making the dog *knock-kneed*. The luxation is not considered a painful condition but after enough time, arthritis sets in, which is indeed painful.

Surgery is very effective at correcting this problem. Firstly, the groove along which the patella runs is deepened whilst preserving the cartilage (healthy cartilage is a miraculous thing, more slippery than ice!). If the crest on the tibia where the thigh muscle attaches has migrated inward, the crest will have to be removed and pinned back where it belongs to straighten out the leg. Then the ligaments are tightened up as the joint is closed.

During recovery time easy walking (no running or jumping) is helpful. The dog should be using the leg by two weeks post-operatively though some dogs must be retrained to use the leg after surgery.

Kind Regards,
Scott and Chris