

Sports Related Injuries

A Common Occurrence

By: Dr. Caleb Hudson, DACVS and Kate Lawrence
Gulf Coast Veterinary Specialists
www.gcv.com

Sports-related injuries are a common occurrence for people, and an accepted part of the risk associated with playing a sport. Unfortunately, the risk of injury is much the same for our pets, even if the “sport” is playing fetch!

The owners of Duke, a

pain medication with no improvement, Duke was referred to an orthopedic specialist, who diagnosed a torn cranial cruciate ligament (CrCL), which is very similar to a person tearing their anterior cruciate ligament (ACL). Duke's CrCL was surgically repaired, and after a couple of months, Duke was back to chasing Frisbees again.

Every pet has a different level of regular activity depending on their personality, age, body condition, and health. The upper tier of activity includes the “professional” athletes of the pet world – agility animals, flyball dogs, and hunting or herding dogs are some examples of these high energy competitors. The majority of our pets, however, fall into the “weekend warrior” category. These are the animals who look forward to mom and dad coming home from a long work week to spend time at the dog park, play fetch, or go for a long jog. Even pets who settle into a more sedentary category can experience a sports injury. In fact, a dog who is typically inactive can be at an increased risk for injury if he or she suddenly breaks

into a sprint after a squirrel.

The most common sports-related injuries involve joint or muscle injuries. Ligament tears in the knee are one of the most prevalent injuries, but elbow and shoulder injuries, hip problems, fractures, slipped or herniated spinal discs, and dislocated joints are also common. Young dogs can develop growth abnormalities which may result in short or crooked limbs due to injuries of the growth plates. Lacerations, bite wounds and other types of non-orthopedic trauma can occur as well. For any suspected injury, it is best to see your family veterinarian for an evaluation as soon as possible. They may recommend a consultation with a board-certified surgeon to discuss options for your pet, such as minimally-invasive surgery, arthroscopy, or joint replacement if severe damage has occurred. Many fractures can now be repaired minimally-invasively by an orthopedic surgeon with new, state-of-the-art diagnostics and surgical equipment. Arthroscopy can be used to treat many joint injuries with minimal discomfort for the patient. Shoulder ligament injuries and instability, elbow bone chips, tarsal (ankle) and hip injuries, and even hip and elbow dysplasia can often be treated minimally invasively with arthroscopy.

Often patients with sports injuries will benefit from physical rehabilitation,

or “rehab”, after surgical repair. Physical therapists or veterinarians trained in animal rehabilitation are a great resource to help pets recover as quickly as possible. In addition, these rehab experts can help develop a conditioning program to get your pet to the perfect body weight and physical condition, reducing the chance of future injury. Following a rehabilitation evaluation, a treatment plan may be formulated to help your pet safely return to maximum performance. For many conditions, treatment options include underwater treadmill exercises, cold laser therapy, hands-on joint and soft tissue mobilizations, and instructions for a home program to compliment clinical treatments.

No matter what your pet's level of activity, there is a risk for sports-related injuries. Keep your pet in good body condition to give them the best tools to have a healthy, injury-free life, and monitor them closely for any signs of lameness, difficulty rising, difficulty going up and down stairs, abnormal gait, or stiffness. Check with your family veterinarian if you suspect your pet has a sports-related injury or an injury that interferes with sport-related activities to determine what treatment or type of surgical intervention may be necessary to get your pet back to playing fetch, competing, or squirrel chasing!

young Labrador Retriever, experienced this first hand after he chased a Frisbee one weekend, and then trotted back to his dad limping on his right rear leg. After a trip to the vet and a round of

