

Walker Valley Veterinary Hospital

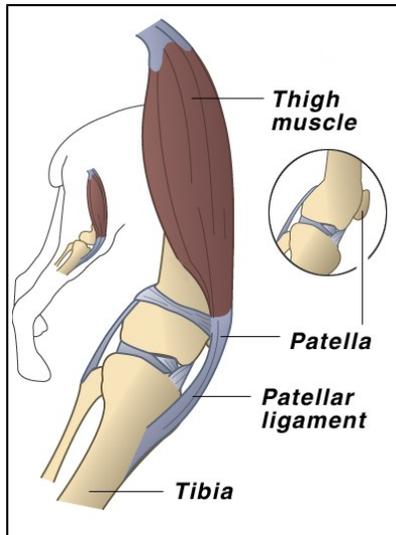
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LUXATING PATELLA

What is a luxating patella?

The patella, or knee cap, is normally located in the center of the knee joint. The term *luxating* means “out of place” or “dislocated”. Therefore, a luxating patella is a knee cap that moves out of its normal location. This condition is often congenital, but can also be the result of an injury.



What causes a patellar luxation?

The patella, or knee cap, lives in a notch (trochlear groove) of the femur and is held in place by the *patellar ligament* which runs from the bottom of the knee cap to a point on the tibia (the bone in the lower leg) just below the knee joint.

The patella luxates when the patellar ligament is too far medial or the trochlear groove is not deep enough to hold it in place. As the thigh muscles contract, the force is pulled medially or to the inside of the knee. After several months or years of this abnormal movement, the inner side of the trochlear groove in the femur wears down and the patella is then free to dislocate. When this occurs, the dog has difficulty bearing weight on the leg. It may learn how to kick the leg and snap the patella back into its normal location. However, because the side of the groove is gone, it dislocates again easily.

Does a luxating patella cause any long-term problems for my dog?

Some dogs can tolerate this problem for many years, even for all of their lives. However, this weakness in the knee predisposes the knee to other injuries, especially torn cruciate ligaments. Dogs with luxating patella will usually develop significant and painful arthritis.

Can a luxating patella be corrected?

Surgery should be performed if your dog has a persistent lameness or if other knee injuries occur secondary to the luxating patella.

Surgical repair involves three steps:

- 1) The point of attachment of the patellar ligament is cut from the bone and transplanted to its proper location.
- 2) The groove in the femur is deepened so the patella will stay in place.
- 3) The capsule around the joint is tightened. When the patella luxates, the joint capsule stretches. Tightening it helps to prevent the patella from luxating again.

If the surgery is performed before arthritis occurs, the prognosis is excellent. Your dog should regain full use of its leg. However, if arthritis has already occurred, your dog will often experience intermittent pain in the joint. Long term anti-inflammatory medications are used to ensure your pet remains pain-free.