

### **What is a cruciate ligament?**

The cruciate ligaments are found in the knee or stifle joint. This joint is basically a hinge joint that moves only in one plane, backwards and forwards. Although there are many ligaments making up the joint, the range of movement is largely controlled by two bands of fibrous tissue that cross over inside each knee joint. These are the cruciate ligaments. One is in front of the other, hence they are known as anterior (cranial) and posterior or (caudal) cruciate ligaments.

### **How does a cruciate injury occur?**

Traumatic cruciate injury is caused by a twisting injury to this hinge joint. It is most often seen in dogs when moving at speed and suddenly changing direction so that the majority of the weight of the body is taken on the joint. The injury usually affects only the anterior or cranial cruciate ligament. Once stretched or torn, the joint is then unstable and weight bearing is difficult if not impossible. A chronic form of cruciate injury occurs due to weakening of the ligament, either as a result of age or disease. The ligament becomes stretched or partially torn and lameness may be only slight and intermittent, but with continued use of the joint the condition gradually worsens. Cruciate injury is nearly always accompanied by damage to the meniscal cartilage which forms a cushioning pad within the joint, - this can be very painful.

### **How is it diagnosed?**

Dogs with cruciate disease are always lame on the affected hind-limb, but the lameness can either occur suddenly at exercise or come on gradually over a period of weeks or months. Sometimes a 'click' can be heard coming from the joint. A specific test, known as the anterior draw test, is used to check accurately if the cruciate ligament is weak or torn; this is usually performed under general anaesthesia.

### **How is it treated?**

Many small dogs weighing less than 10kg will recover with an extended period of rest and medical treatment (NB West Highland White Terriers are often an exception to this rule) Larger dogs normally require surgery to stabilise the joint. There are a large number of different surgical techniques used for cruciate disease; the most common is the placement of a Lateral Suture, the technique used at the Shrubbery. TPLO (Tibial Plateau Levelling Osteotomy) is usually a referral procedure The choice of surgery for any dog will depend on the size, weight, breed and temperament of the dog Whatever type of operation is performed, following a strict recovery programme is essential. Physiotherapy, controlled swimming ( hydrotherapy ) and acupuncture may play a very useful part in recovery

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