Revision orthopaedic surgery

Further surgery after a previous operation | Dogs and cats

Sometimes a previously treated bone or joint remains painful or develops a complication. Revision surgery aims to identify and address the cause of the problem.

About the procedure

Why might another operation be needed?

A previous repair may have failed because the bone has not healed, an implant has moved or broken, the joint remains unstable, infection has developed, or the original disease has progressed. Sometimes a new injury is responsible for issues. Continuing lameness does not automatically mean an operation has failed; recovery may be slower than expected or another joint may be causing pain.

How is the problem investigated?

The surgeon will review the previous history, operation notes and imaging where available, and examine the limb. New X-rays and sometimes CT help assess alignment, healing and implants. Blood tests or samples from the joint, wound or deeper tissues may be needed when infection is suspected. A deep infection can exist even without an obvious open wound. The results help decide whether surgery is likely to help.

What might revision surgery involve?

Treatment varies widely. A painful or loose implant may need removal; a bone that has not united may need renewed fixation, bone grafting and treatment of infection. A recurrent kneecap or hip problem may require reconstruction, replacement or a different salvage procedure. In some cases, treatment is staged, with infection control first and definitive repair later. The surgeon may need to adapt the plan after assessing the tissues during surgery.

Could there be another option?

If the limb is stable and the problem is manageable, pain relief, rehabilitation, wound treatment or monitoring may be appropriate. Other surgical options, including amputation in selected severe cases, may provide a better quality of life than repeated complex reconstruction. Your vet will discuss realistic outcomes, expected costs and practical care needs.

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Recovery, risks and home care

Recovery and home care

Expected outcome

Revision can improve comfort and function, but scar tissue, infection, poor bone quality or prior joint damage make the result less predictable.

Caring for your pet after revision

Follow the new discharge instructions rather than the plan from the original surgery. Restrict activity as directed, protect the wound and give all prescribed medicines. If antibiotics are required, use them exactly as prescribed; do not use leftover medication or stop without advice. A bandage or external frame may need separate care instructions.

Follow-up and expectations

Early wound reviews and repeat imaging will be arranged according to the revision. Bone healing may take several months, especially after infection or previous non-union. Laboratory results may change treatment. Keep your appointments even if your pet seems more comfortable. Discuss what level of improvement would represent a successful outcome for your individual pet.

When should I call?

Contact the practice promptly if the wound begins to drain, pain or swelling increases, the limb becomes unstable, or your pet suddenly deteriorates. If a previous problem appears to be recurring, early assessment may help prevent further damage.

Questions to ask your vet

What caused the original problem? Is infection suspected? What are the alternatives if this revision does not succeed?

Discussing risks and complications

As with any surgical procedure, complications can occur. Your surgeon will discuss the possible complications, individual risks and expected outcome for your pet during the pre-operative consultation.

General anaesthesia can cause serious complications, including death. Your veterinary team will explain individual risks and alternatives.

Your veterinary team will discuss the recommended treatment, alternatives and the risks of general anaesthesia for your individual pet.

Important information

Check the wound daily; prevent licking and keep it dry. Give prescribed medicines only. Report vomiting, diarrhoea, poor appetite or increasing illness. For breathing difficulty, collapse, uncontrolled bleeding or severe distress, seek emergency care immediately.

Follow the personalised discharge plan; this sheet is not a consent form. Contact your own practice or its out-of-hours service for urgent care.