Total hip replacement

THR | Dogs and selected cats

A hip replacement removes the painful ball-and-socket surfaces and replaces them with artificial components. The aim is to restore a comfortable, functional hip.

About the procedure

Why might my pet need a new hip?

Hip dysplasia means that the ball and socket of the hip joint do not fit together properly. Over time, the joint becomes damaged and arthritic. Other causes of severe hip pain include injury, a failed previous operation or disease affecting the ball of the hip joint. Pets may struggle to rise, climb steps or exercise, lose muscle over the back legs or appear stiff after rest. The severity of pain and disability matters more than an X-ray alone.

Who is a suitable candidate?

THR is considered when hip pain is significant and other treatments are insufficient or unsuitable. The vet will assess both hips, the knees, spine and general health. Detailed X-rays allow implant sizing and assessment of bone quality; additional imaging like CT scan or tests may be needed. Active infection, certain neurological problems, poor bone quality or inability to safely restrict activity can make replacement unsuitable. Size, maturity and anatomy determine available implant options.

What happens during surgery?

The damaged ball and neck at the top of the thigh bone are removed. A stem and artificial ball are placed in the thigh bone, and a new socket is fitted into the pelvis. Components may be fixed with bone cement or designed to achieve stable fixation without cement, depending on the chosen system. The surgeon checks the fit, movement and stability, and takes X-rays. The implants usually stay in place for life.

What are the alternatives?

Depending on the case, options include weight management, appropriate pain relief, adapted exercise and rehabilitation. Some young dogs may be candidates for hip-preserving operations before arthritis develops or thigh bone is severely displaced. Femoral head and neck excision (FHNE) removes the ball without replacing it. It has different functional expectations. If both hips are affected, one replacement may provide sufficient improvement, or staged surgery may be considered.

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Recovery, risks and home care

Recovery and home care

Expected outcome

A successful replacement may give normal hip function. The outcome depends on the implant, bone quality, muscle mass, hip conformation and other conditions affecting mobility.

Protecting the new hip

The first weeks are critical even if your pet walks well. Strict cage rest and controlled lead trips for toileting are essential. Use a support sling only if instructed, and keep cats away from furniture and climbing opportunities. Do not force the hip through exercises or stretch it without approval. Follow the surgeon's restrictions during the recovery period.

Follow-up and long-term care

An early wound check and repeat X-rays are usually planned, with imaging often at about 6–8 weeks and further checks depending on the implant and healing. In most cases, exercise is expected to begin six weeks after surgery. Keep your pet at a healthy weight and discuss high-impact activities before resuming them. If bilateral surgery is necessary (in fewer than 20% of cases despite bilateral disease), the second joint can be operated on four months after the first operation, although earlier surgery is required in some cases.

When should I call?

Sudden severe pain, a leg held in an unusual position, an apparent change in leg length or sudden inability to bear weight may indicate dislocation or fracture. Contact the practice urgently; do not try to move the hip back into place.

Questions to ask your vet

Which implant system is planned? What restrictions will apply? Who will manage an urgent complication or revision?

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.