

Physical Therapy for dogs prone to luxating patellas

Information compiled by Debby Rothman

Special care for the dog with knee problems: All puppies' knees are evaluated prior to placement, including a grading of each patella. Your Gomba Lhasa Apso may be prone to luxating patellas. A great deal of increased strength and comfort can be obtained through appropriate exercise.

Marty Peace, Physical Therapist with Veterinary Referral Center of Colorado (Englewood, Colorado), makes the following recommendations for dogs with luxating patellas (knee problems):

- Regular daily walks of 10-15 minutes, or more than that if the dog can tolerate greater length. Two short walks may be better than one long one if the dog gets sore; if your dog limps, you've overdone it. A steady, maintained walk on the leash (rather than run and stop, run and stop) is excellent therapy because the dog makes use of all four legs symmetrically.
- Going up steps strengthens the quadriceps. Walking uphill and walking on uneven terrain (off the sidewalk) are also good strengtheners.
- Standing on the back feet and "dancing" 5-10 steps for 10-30 seconds, two times a day, helps considerably.
- Going over small obstacles and walking in figure eights or through cones or weave poles will help build strength and flexibility.
- Swimming in a deep tub or Jacuzzi (moderate the temperature to mid-80s) strengthens the muscles without the strain of bearing weight; start with 5 minutes with a goal of 30 minutes.
- Massaging the front of the thigh or holding above the knee and stretching a leg back can help relieve discomfort.

How do you know if your dog has a knee problem? A veterinarian can make the diagnosis, but you may see signs on your own, such as an odd "skip" in the dog's gait, or "bunny-hopping" to protect the loose knee joint. The dog may be carrying up to 90% of its weight on the front legs instead of an appropriate 60-70% of its weight on the back legs. In severe cases where the dog is in continual pain, surgery may be warranted. Take care if you know or suspect your dog has knee problems, but if your dog is asymptomatic, don't limit activity, since exercise is good at warding off problems. Keeping your dog on the lean side is a good idea, since excess body weight stresses the joints, and it's also a good idea to give your dog glucosamine supplements to support joint health.