PAW HEALTH NETWORK, INC.

POST-OPERATIVE FHO

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The hip joint, or coxofemoral joint in mammals, is a standard ball-in-socket joint that attaches the rear leg to the body. The head of the femur bone acts as the “ball” and a small cup (acetabulm) on the pelvis acts as the “socket.” These two structures are attached and stabilized by a large internal joint ligament, an outer joint capsule, and the surrounding muscles.

Several conditions exist (advanced hip dysplasia, traumatic hip luxation, etc.) that may require the removal of the femoral head, but not warrant an entire limb amputation. The procedure to remove the femoral head is called a ***femoral head osteotomy*** or ***FHO***.

Once the head of the femur is removed, there is no more ball-in-socket joint. The femur is kept in an approximate normal location by the leg muscles and eventually the body will create fibrous connective tissues to create a false joint.

SURGICAL TREATMENT

As a relatively quick procedure, patients undergo general anesthesia to allow proper removal of the femoral head.

Patients are typically hospitalized for 12-24 hours after surgery to ensure stability, mobility, and proper pain control.

POST OPERATIVE MANAGEMENT

First 2 Weeks Post-Op (after the operation)

- Monitor incision for swelling, discharge, separation, or extreme discomfort.
    - Patient will require recheck if abnormalities are noted.
    - Scheduled recheck for stitch or staple removal will occur around 10-14 days after the operation.
- Focus on pain management and rest to allow proper healing of tissues.
    - Slinging is not encouraged as ongoing mobility and movement of the surgical limb is ideal.
- Warm compresses for 10 to 20 minutes, 3-4 times per day are helpful to improve circulation to the surgical area.
- Therapeutic massage performed by a certified veterinary massage therapist can improve lymphatic flow, aid in tissue healing, and soothe sore muscles.
- Laser therapy will also have similar effects on lymphatic flow, tissue healing, and relief.

4-6 Weeks Post-Op

- Focus is on strengthening muscles to prevent and resolve atrophy (muscle degeneration) from disuse.
    - Walking through water is better than swimming.
    - Walking, especially upstairs or uphill.
    - Dancing (holding patient upright to force hindlimb walking).
- Patients may require upwards of 4-6 weeks to bear weight normally on the surgical limb.
    - Healing is generally complete after six weeks.
    - The recovery time may be prolonged if activity is limited by arthritis in any of the other legs, by the size or weight of the patient, or if there is scarring or atrophy of muscles from the initial condition that necessitated the ***FHO*** in the first place.
- More formal rehabilitation programs can be designed for patients with these situations or who are behind schedule on their recovery for unknown reasons.

Adapted from Clinical Veterinary Advisor