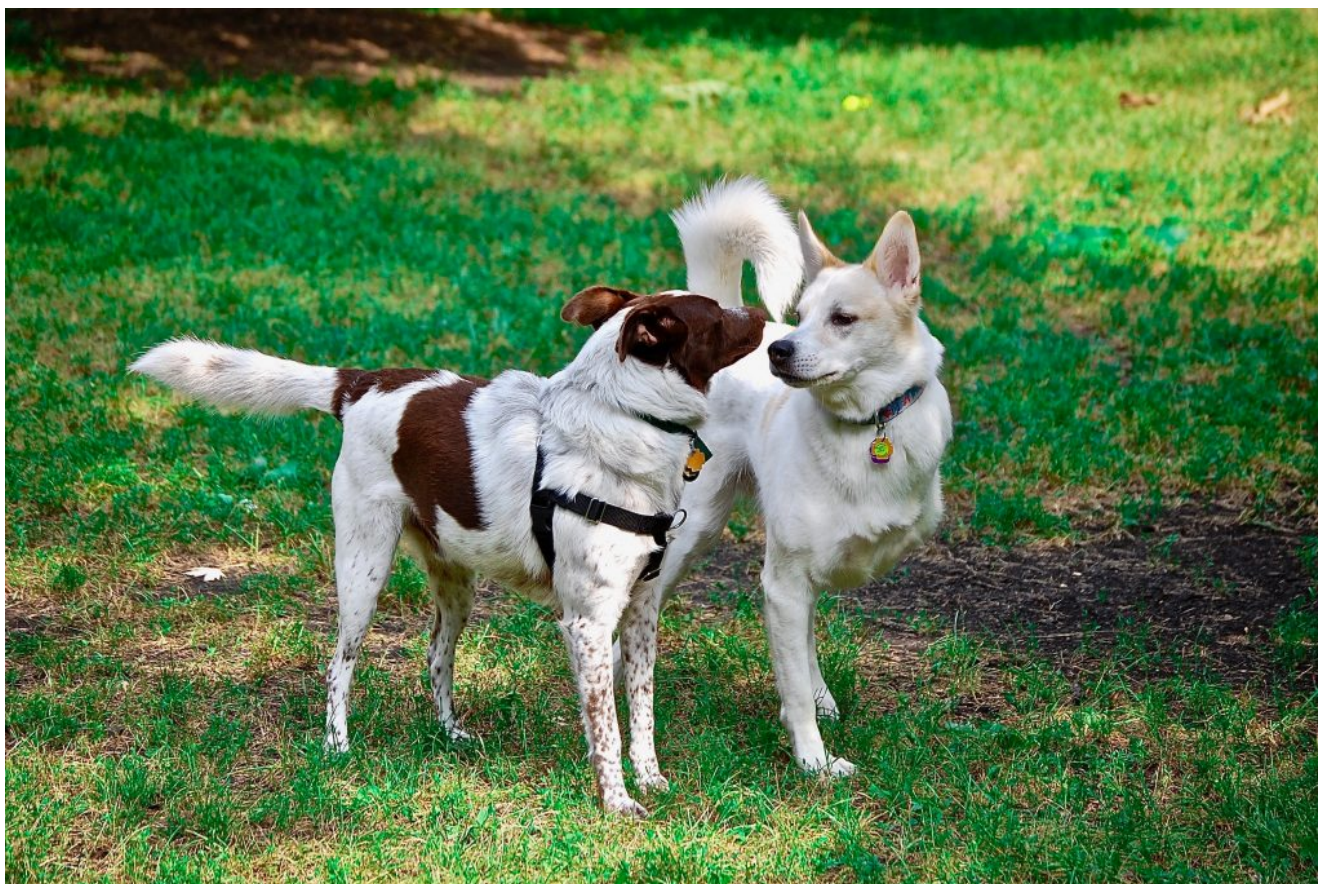


Limb Amputation - When a Leg is Removed

I think most of you will agree it's fun to watch dogs play at the park. I smile from ear to ear watching them frolic with each other. Every once and a while, you come across a dog with three limbs, a tripod as they are often affectionately called. These 3-legged companions are happy. They get around well and enjoy romping around with their friends. Interestingly, many humans feel badly for these pets. They feel sorry for them. This week's post is dedicated to sharing information about limb amputation in pets with the hope of increasing awareness tripods can live enjoyable lives. Happy reading!



What is limb amputation?

Amputation is the surgical removal of all (or part of) a limb (leg). Major reasons a pet may benefit from limb amputation are:

- Traumatic injuries
- Cancers (i.e.: osteosarcoma)
- Severe infections
- Neurologic diseases
- Debilitating osteoarthritis

Not every patient with the above-listed conditions is a good candidate for limb amputation. Poor candidates are very large dogs, obese pets, and those animals with other conditions (i.e.: orthopedic and/or neurologic problems) that affect other limbs.



A Great Dane with a right pelvic limb amputation.

How is limb amputation performed?

A pet may need a forelimb (front leg) or pelvic limb (back leg) amputated. When forelimb amputation is performed, usually the entire limb, including the scapula (shoulder blade), is removed. Amputation below the shoulder blade is of no physical benefit to a pet.



A dog with a right forelimb amputation.

When pelvic limb amputation is performed, it's usually done to the level of mid thigh. However, amputation to the level of the coxofemoral joint (hip joint) may be recommended when disease - like infection or cancer - affects the femur (thigh bone).



A cat with a right pelvic limb amputation.

Prior to anesthesia and surgery, your veterinarian will recommend some important diagnostic tests, including:

- Complete blood count - to evaluate red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets
- Serum biochemical profile - to evaluate liver enzymes, kidney values, and electrolytes (i.e.: sodium, potassium)
- Urinalysis - to evaluate kidney function and look for evidence of urinary tract problems
- Radiographs (x-rays) - to visualize leg abnormalities, as well as look for problems in the chest and/or abdomen in traumatized patients

Many veterinarians are comfortable performing limb amputation. I think it's important for pet owners to consider both their pet's surgery *and* their pet's post-operative recovery before coming home. Obviously, amputation patients need appropriate pain management and are ideally monitored around-the-clock until they are discharged from the hospital. Many primary care teams are not able to monitor and medicate pets 24/7. As such, pet owners may find it beneficial to

have their pet's surgery performed by a board-certified veterinary surgeon in a referral specialty hospital that provides around-the-clock supervised patient care.

How will my pet be after limb amputation?

Major potential complications of amputation are bleeding, incision issues [i.e.: failure to heal properly, premature opening (called dehiscence), infection], and cancer recurrence. Unlike in humans, phantom limb syndrome and neuromas where nerves were severed are extremely rare.

Most amputation patients are hospitalized for ~48 hours post-operatively. Pets are discharged when they're able to get around on their own (or with gentle sling support), they're comfortable, they're taking medications by mouth without complication, and they're eating on their own. Post-operative care instructions are tailored for each pet depending on the reason for them needing an amputation.

A cat who had a right pelvic limb amputation is comfortable walking around 24 hours after surgery

Some amputation patients respond well to rehabilitation therapy after their stitches have been removed, typically 10-14 days after surgery. Just as humans often benefit from physical therapy, so too may dogs and cats. Indeed, pet owners may choose to partner with a certified canine rehabilitation practitioner (CCRP) and/or a board-certified veterinary sports medicine and rehabilitation veterinarian to develop a logical post-operative rehabilitation plan.

A dog playing following a left pelvic limb amputation.

The take-away message about limb amputation...

Occasionally our dogs and cats may need to have a limb amputation. This is a major surgery, but most pets function extremely well following amputation. I strongly encourage pet owners with dogs and cats who are scheduled for or who have had limb amputation to visit Tripawds, an wonderful community with helpful resources about living with pets following amputation.

To find a board-certified veterinary surgeon, please visit the American College of Veterinary Surgeons.

To find a board-certified veterinary sports medicine and rehabilitation veterinarian, please visit the American College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation.

To find a certified canine rehabilitation practitioner, [click here](#).

Wishing you wet-nosed kisses,

CriticalCareDVM

