

Cranial Cruciate Ligament Repair: Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy (TPLO)

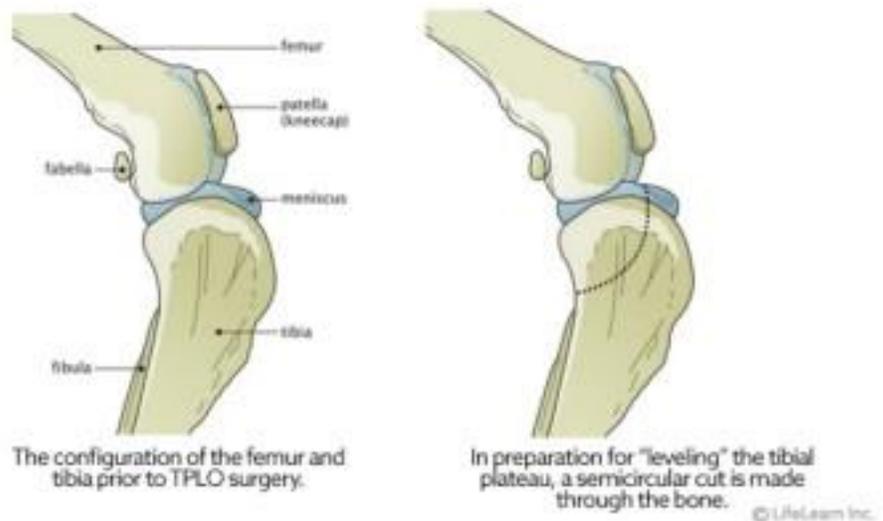
The most common joint injury of dogs is tearing of the cranial cruciate ligament (CCL). This ligament is similar to the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in humans. There are two cruciate ligaments inside the knee: the cranial cruciate ligament and caudal cruciate ligament. They are called cruciates because they cross inside the middle of the knee.

When the Cranial Cruciate Ligament is torn or injured, the shin bone (tibia) slides forward with respect to the thigh bone (femur), which is known as a positive drawer sign. The forward movement of the tibia creates pain by stretching the other ligaments and tissues surrounding the affected joint. The laxity in the joint also creates increased pressure and can lead to damage of the menisci in the knee. Most dogs with this injury cannot walk normally and experience pain. The resulting instability damages the cartilage and surrounding bones and leads to osteoarthritis (OA).

What options are there for repairing my dog's torn CCL?

When the cranial cruciate ligament is torn, surgical stabilization of the knee joint is often required, especially in larger or more active dogs. Surgery is generally recommended as quickly as possible to reduce permanent, irreversible joint damage and relieve pain.

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Several surgical techniques are currently used to correct CCL rupture. Each procedure has unique advantages and potential drawbacks. Your veterinarian will guide you through the decision-making process and advise you on the best surgical option for your pet.

This handout describes tibial plateau leveling osteotomy (TPLO) surgery. There are other options for repair. TTA (Tibial tuberosity advancement) is considered by some surgeons to be equally effective. Other techniques involve implantation of artificial materials that mimic the action of the ligament. These procedures are better than no surgery but are considered inferior to the TPLO.

My veterinarian is recommending a tibial plateau leveling osteotomy to fix my dog's torn CCL. What does this surgery involve?

A major advancement in the treatment of CCL rupture has been the development of tibial plateau leveling osteotomy or TPLO. This surgery changes the angle and relationship of the femur and the tibia. The overall intent of the surgery is to reduce the amount that the tibia shifts forward during a stride. This is accomplished by making a semicircular cut through

the top of the tibia, rotating the top of the tibia, and using a bone plate to allow the tibia to heal. This realignment of the surfaces within the stifle (knee) helps to provide stability during a stride and helps to reduce future joint inflammation and arthritis. By carefully adjusting the angle or slope of the top of the tibia, surgeons are able to replicate a more normal configuration of the knee joint and reduce mechanical stress.

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To better understand the purpose of leveling the tibia, we often use the analogy of a wagon on a hill. Imagine a wagon tied to a post on the slope of a hill. As long as the rope holds, the wagon does not roll downhill. If we add excess weight (or downward force) to the wagon, the rope could break, and the wagon will roll down the hill. However, if the wagon is on level ground, it will not roll forward with added weight, even if the rope is broken.

In this example, the wagon is the femur, and it slides down slope of the top of the tibia when the CCL is ruptured. This instability leads to damage and destruction of the cartilage and bones of the knee joint. TPLO surgery levels the tibia to prevent the femur from sliding forward, thereby stabilizing the joint.

TPLO surgery involves making a curved cut in the tibia from the front to the back, much like half a smiley face. The top section of the tibia is then rotated backward until the angle between the tibia and femur is deemed appropriately level, typically between 2 and 14 degrees, with 5 degrees being the ideal angle. A metal bone plate is then used to affix the two sections of tibia in the desired positions, allowing the tibia to heal in its new configuration.



Once the cut in the tibia is made, the bone segment is rotated to achieve a "level" tibial plateau.

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The rotated tibial segment is secured for healing using a specially designed orthopedic plate. It may be appropriate to consider removal of this plate once healing is complete.

How long will it take for my dog to recover from TPLO surgery?

Healing from TPLO surgery is generally rapid.

- About half of all canine patients will begin walking on the injured leg within 24 hours after surgery.
- At 2 weeks postoperatively, most dogs are bearing moderate to complete amounts of weight on the affected leg.
- By 10 weeks, most dogs do not have an appreciable limp or gait abnormality.
- As mentioned above, at 3 months postoperatively, the majority of dogs can begin walking and playing normally, with only the most stressful activities restricted.
- Within 4 to 6 months, most dogs can resume full physical activity.

Pain management during and after stifle (knee) surgery is critical, so be sure to give all medications as prescribed and use them until they are gone. Physical rehabilitation post-operatively will speed healing. Ask your veterinarian about incorporating rehabilitation into your dog's recovery plan.

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The most common complication after TPLO is infection. Studies conclude that infection occurs in less than 10% of all patients, with many surgeons reporting much lower complication rates. Your dog will need a recheck examination and radiographs (X-rays) to ensure that the area is healing properly.