

Dealing With Patellar Luxation in Dogs How to Cope With Your Pup's Floating Kneecaps

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Patellar luxation in dogs is a common problem amongst the tinier breeds. Essentially a fancy term for a trick knee, this condition can crop up out of the blue, causing your dog to limp and yowl.

A common problem in tiny dogs, patellar luxation is the technical term for floating kneecaps, or “trick knees.” This condition tends to manifest [during times of activity](#), when the kneecap, or patella, pops out of its socket. This will cause the dog to take their weight off the luxated leg.

The problem can seem to come out of nowhere, and just as quickly right itself when the kneecap re-enters its socket. Here are the key facts.

What Is Patellar Luxation?

The patella, or kneecap, should sit snugly inside a groove between the femur and tibia (upper and lower leg bone, respectively), held in place by a series of ligaments. In [large breed dogs](#), the groove is deep, giving the patella a nice crevice to call home. However, in [smaller breed dogs](#), this groove is far more shallow, leaving more of the kneecap hanging out, and putting a greater strain on the ligament holding it in place.

As such, there are two main types of [genetic problems](#) that can lead to patellar luxation. The first (and most common) is an abnormally shallow groove between the leg bones, making it easy for the kneecap to pop out. This problem is often paired with another malformation, which is a weakening of the ligaments due to the excess strain placed on them by having to compensate for the shallow groove.

The second type is a result of the tibia ligament being offset slightly, throwing off joint alignment and causing the kneecap to be easily removed from its socket. This problem is most common in dogs with short legs (like Dachshunds and Basset Hounds).

Which Breeds are Most Affected?

While there are a veritable ton of breeds that can develop patellar luxation, the breeds most likely to develop this condition are:

- [Boston Terrier](#)
- [Chihuahua](#)
- [Jack Russell Terrier](#)
- [Maltese](#)
- [Miniature/Toy Poodle](#)
- [Papillon](#)
- [Pekingese](#)
- [Pomeranian](#)
- [Yorkshire Terrier](#)

How Serious is Patellar Luxation?

It depends. Patellar luxation can occur at varying degrees of severity (grades 1-4) and whichever group your dog falls into will determine the best treatment option.

- Grade 1 - The kneecap will pop out only occasionally, and when it does it will pop itself back in place.
- Grade 2 - Only slightly more serious than grade 1. Here the kneecap may occasionally need a hand resetting itself, but when it is popped back into place, it will stay there until the next incident.
- Grade 3 - The kneecap is popped out most of the time, and while it can be reinserted manually, it tends to pop itself right back out again.

- Grade 4 - The kneecap is almost always outside of the groove, and is nearly impossible to get it reinserted.

What Can I Do About It?

Patellar luxation is a degenerative condition, meaning it will get worse over time, especially if nothing is done to treat it. The earlier you make an effort to reduce the effects of the condition, the less likely it is that your dog will require surgery.

- **Daily Exercise:** Although it might seem counterintuitive, keeping your dog active is a great way to prevent the condition from getting worse. By building muscle tone and keeping your dog at a healthy body weight, you can reduce the effects of this condition substantially.
- **Joint Supplements:** There are plenty of vet-verified supplements designed to [bolster joint health in dogs](#), so try adding one of these to their diet.
- **Diet:** There are plenty of prescription dog foods that contain a specially formulated diet designed to [maximize joint rehabilitation](#).
- **Chiropractic/Acupuncture Treatment:** Having a specialist work on your pet's problem areas can help prevent the degradation of their condition.
- **Medication:** For more serious cases, [medicine like Adequan Injections](#) can help slow the onset of the condition, improving joint fluid production.
- **Surgery:** If the condition has gone too far and your pet is in constant pain, the only remaining option is to let a vet get in there and reshape the groove in their knee. This is certainly the most extreme solution, and while it will put your dog out of commission for a while, chances are that when they spring back, you will notice a drastic change in their mobility and overall disposition.

[More on Joint Problems in Dogs](#)

[A Joint Health Exercise Routine for Dogs](#)

[5 Ways to Prevent Joint Problems in Your Dog](#)

[8 Ways to Treat Dog Joint Pain](#)

[Joint Health Products for Pets with Arthritis](#)

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