

## Ask the physiotherapist

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**What should I do, my dog was injured last year, it sustained a sprain and hunting season starts soon? Can I take it hunting, and what should I do to get it functionally fit again? It is a very good hunting dog, how can I do this?**

My dog was injured last year during hunting, it sustained a sprain, and now cannot put weight on its hind leg, it doesn't press down, and it puts no weight on it.

We have taken it to a vet who confirmed that it had injured its left hind knee. The x-rays show there is some calcification in or near the knee joint of the left hind leg. It has been given Rimadyl (pain alleviation + anti-inflammatory drug) and we have reduced its level of activity. We have done mock training, water training and carefully and gradually increased the level of activity it does. Despite all this, the problem and symptoms appeared again after a training session that lasted a couple of hours, even though it had been symptom free for several months.

I was asked this question by a dog owner who really wants to take his dog hunting but most of all wants his dog to be free of pain and restored to full fitness. First of all my answer is that if a complete clinical examination is performed it must include an examination of the left hind leg, knee, status of the joint, mobility, active and passive movement, pain during the palpation of various structures round the knee and knee joint, degree of limp, loads, together with x-ray findings vis-à-vis the joint, calcification, development of wear and tear of the cartilage, degeneration of the joint's cartilage and joint's surfaces. Any findings from these examinations will point to whether the knee has a disorder or a combination of pain and inflammation that one has to try and alleviate using various methods and approaches. Furthermore, a differential diagnosis is important, i.e. one has to examine whether the dog might have a back problem that is causing the limp. Back problems can manifest themselves by radiating symptoms into one or more legs. Nerve related symptoms may occur such as loss of feeling, reduced reflexes, reduced motor functionality, or a reduced ability to be able to walk or tolerate the strain of running.

Sometimes these symptoms can be worsened by increased activity and by demanding activities or ones that put more strain on the dog.

It depends on the condition or status of the injury, the amount of irritation and what the dog can withstand of activity or increased activity. Diagnosis and differential diagnosis are important elements when it comes to choosing the correct methodology both for further examination and treatment with respect to clinical measures, clinical findings and functional diagnoses. In this case we can conclude that the dog has a painful hind knee.

In addition I suggest and recommend checking the dog's hind and pelvis in case it has a pathology (disorder) here, as well as other adjoining joints such as the hip.

Once this has been done, checked by a physiotherapist, vet or chiropractor, one will be able to exclude or demonstrate if it has a back disorder or negative (pathological disorder) condition that is either the primary cause of the pain in the knee/leg or a secondary cause of the knee pain. If one has concentrated on the dog's knee and has found that this is the problem area I would like to give you some advice regarding treatment or applied physiotherapy with respect to

the existing pain problem. There are various methods of pain treatment, pain alleviation physiotherapy. These can include laser treatment, ultra sound, short wave, rebox, TENS, heat or cold treatment, or a combination of acupuncture or acupuncture-like TENS, in addition to an agreement with a vet concerning pain alleviating or anti-inflammation medicines. The duration of the pain and inflammation can vary from dog to dog and disorder to disorder, or from phase of disorder to phase of disorder.

The dog's level of activity must be reduced until the limp is reduced to a minimum during the acute and sub-acute phases of the disorder.

It would be advantageous to apply the physiotherapy treatment in parallel with the reduced stress and medicinal phases. Reduce the pain and irritation/inflammation as quickly as possible. When one has reduced the pain to zero or the condition is more under control one can gradually and carefully increase the level of training and activity, adjusting it according to the dog's diagnosis.

Pain or a negative reaction to activity, the reoccurrence of inflammation that does not immediately appear after the activity, will possibly form a negative accumulation curve with pain and inflammation as the response following a period of too much activity with respect to the dog's actual condition.

It will be difficult to treat this type of injury if the pathology is extensive given that pointers are very active dogs.

The combination of reduced activity, rest, treatment and a gradual increase in activity does not suit a pointer's or hunting dog's temperament.

If you have access to a swimming pool, or can take it swimming during the spring and summer, this is a good way of training and rehabilitating the dog, since it does not put any weight bearing stress on the knee.

Furthermore, the right dose of training together with adequate physiotherapy must be adjusted for the individual dog according to its condition and the clinical status of the injury.

It is and can be difficult to provide advice just over the telephone regarding conditions and disorders such as these, which more often require good advice, treatment and rehabilitation and meeting the actual patient so that one can follow the dog's clinical status, course of treatment, and the effect of the right dose of activity in relation to the disorder and its phase.

I hope I have managed to shed some light on the problem. Dog owners who are struggling with problems of this nature with their hunting dogs are welcome to contact me regarding how to go about helping their dogs to make a full, and hopefully lasting, recovery.

Happy hunting!

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