



Southern Counties

VETERINARY
SPECIALISTS

Arthrodesis

Information Sheet

**Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists
Specialist Referral Service**



What is arthrodesis?

An arthrodesis, or joint fusion, is a surgical procedure which induces bony fusion across a damaged, painful joint so that motion can be eliminated, therefore also eliminating the discomfort arising from the area and allowing comfortable use of the limb.

How is it done?

A joint fusion is a full surgery (not key-hole) in which the damaged joint is approached, the cartilage at the end of the bones removed and, after placing a bone graft to accelerate healing (usually obtained from the shoulder area, or others, of the same patient), the joint is set at a functional angle by using internal fixation, usually metal plates and screws. A bandage or a hard splint may be used for a few weeks after the surgery, to support the limb. This bony fusion takes about 8 weeks on average.

What joints can be fused?

In our patients, the most commonly fused major joint are the carpus (wrist, perhaps followed by the tarsus ankle joint), typically after severe ligament injuries that cannot be repaired

in other ways. The functional results are very good, with pain-free use of the limb, with a very mild gait change but good enough to exercise normally and return to working in hunting and herding dogs. Shoulder fusion can also be done with very good results. Other joints, such as elbow and knee are occasionally fused, but the prognosis is not as good. Hip fusion is not possible and, other techniques such as total hip replacement are available for these patients.

What can I expect after the surgery?

Patients with an arthrodesis can be expected to leave the hospital the day after the procedure, perhaps with a bandage to control the swelling. If present, this bandage will need to be removed or replaced after a few days. A harder splint (like a half-cast) may be applied for a few weeks as the bone heals, and you will need to keep it clean and dry when your pet goes outside. Exercise will be restricted to very short lead walks for toileting purposes and one-room restriction at home, until we check bony healing typically 8 weeks after the surgery. Some physiotherapy may be needed during the healing process, to make sure other joints don't get too stiff and muscle mass is not lost. Gradual return to normal exercise will be allowed after this, under your supervision.



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