



# Honey's Canine Health Guide N°8

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## CRUCIATE LIGAMENT DISEASE

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## A quick overview

The cruciate ligaments run like crossed strings connecting the femur (thigh bone) and the tibia (shin bone) both at the front and the back of the knee. Their role is to keep the knee from overextending and rotating during movement. When injury occurs in the form of tears or rupture of a cruciate ligament, most often the one on the front of the knee (the anterior cruciate ligament), the knee becomes unstable. This causes inflammation and pain and without prompt treatment the increased movement of the unsupported knee will eventually lead to injury of the menisci and ultimately to osteoarthritis of the affected knee.

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## Cruciate ligament damage

Cruciate ligament damage is frequently seen in dogs as well as in humans, where it is a common football injury. Cruciate ligament problems in dogs may happen, as they generally do in humans, as a result of a sudden traumatic incident in an otherwise healthy knee joint. In dogs this is typically seen after a bad fall or a road traffic accident. There is, however, another and much more common presentation of cruciate disease in dogs, in which the cause of the problem isn't a forceful trauma to the knee but rather a ligament that was weak to begin with. In these cases, the onset of lameness may be gradual, and there may be no report of dramatic injury to the knee. The problem sometimes simply gradually worsens over time as the ligament damage progresses and the knee becomes increasingly inflamed and unstable. In some cases, osteoarthritis is already present in the knee by the time the dog is clearly lame and the problem is diagnosed, a sign that the knee has been unstable for some time. In a dog that is predisposed to this more chronic form of degenerative cruciate ligament disease, we often see the rather frustrating scenario in which the dog undergoes surgery on one hind leg, followed by two to three months of rehabilitation, only to then go lame in the other hind leg as the disease becomes noticeable in the opposite knee.

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## Treatment

Your vet, suspecting cruciate ligament damage, will most likely refer your dog to an orthopaedic surgeon, who may need X-rays or an MRI scan to assess the extent of the damage. A ruptured or frayed cruciate ligament can be surgically repaired by a specialist surgeon. This is the recommended approach in most cases once the diagnosis is clear. It is, however, not always necessary. Cruciate-repair surgery may be avoidable in lighter, smaller patients weighing, say, less than 10kg. Indeed, small dogs may recover well with conservative management, in this case strictly enforced rest, anti-inflammatory painkillers and physiotherapy.

Large dogs will do best with surgery. The risk of not operating or of operating too late is that the continued use of an unstable knee by a heavy animal will lead to damage of the menisci and later to osteoarthritis. This is why early diagnosis is so important. The good news is that dogs of all sizes generally do well and regain full use of their knee after appropriate and timely treatment. This is absolutely a problem with a solution.

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## Holistic treatment

Regardless of whether your dog is being managed conservatively or needs surgery for his or her cruciate ligament disease, there are some obvious supportive steps that can help reduce pain, promote healing and support rehabilitation, making all the difference to ensure complete recovery.

### *Physiotherapy and other manual treatments*

Your vet will guide you through a period of rehabilitation lasting at least two to three months. Physiotherapy (possibly with hydrotherapy) plays an important part during this time regardless of whether the animal is being managed conservatively or is recovering after surgical reconstruction of the cruciate ligament. Manual treatments such as massage, physiotherapy and osteopathy are invaluable during the process of rehabilitation to ensure a full recovery. This is equally true whether surgery is judged necessary or not.

### *Homeopathy*

Homeopathic treatment from a veterinary homeopath can be of huge assistance.

### *Acupuncture*

Acupuncture is a powerful pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory treatment and is invaluable during all stages of cruciate disease, from painful acute traumatic injury to ensuring a complete recovery and return to normal use of the knee as well as to help a case of osteoarthritis following an old neglected cruciate ligament rupture.

### *Dietary supplements (nutraceuticals)*

Finally, your vet will probably recommend the long-term use of dietary supplements to support regeneration of joint cartilage and joint fluid and to reduce the risk and severity of developing osteoarthritis. The most relevant supplements are fish oil and glucosamine. These are given long term, preferably for the rest of the dog's life.

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## Professional support

For osteopaths: [www.associationofanimalosteopaths.com](http://www.associationofanimalosteopaths.com)

For veterinary homeopaths: [www.bahvs.com](http://www.bahvs.com)

For veterinary acupuncturists: [www.ivas.com](http://www.ivas.com)

For veterinary physiotherapist: [www.acpat.org/](http://www.acpat.org/)

For information and advice: [www.caninearthritis.co.uk/](http://www.caninearthritis.co.uk/)

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## The role of diet

Diet has a very important role to play in the treatment of cruciate ligament damage. A natural, raw diet will not only aid and support optimum health but will make it easier to keep your dog a good weight.

For dogs suffering from joint issues, a raw diet is especially helpful as it tends to contain high levels of natural glucosamine, which are present in cartilage and connective tissue in the raw meaty bones. Supplementation with oily fish can also be beneficial to increase omega 3 levels in the diet.

A raw diet is also, by the way, an excellent way to help an overweight dog lose a few kilos without feeling hungry. Species appropriate feeding is, therefore, to be recommended in all but very complicated cases (such as where the dog may have had recent bowel surgery).

If you live in the UK, Honey's Health Team will be delighted to devise a special dietary plan for your dog. Feeding a natural diet couldn't be easier and we can do all the hard work for you – working out exactly what your dog should eat each day (and how much, of course), explaining what to buy and how to prepare it. If you would prefer, and you will be under no obligation, we will be happy to supply the food you need and deliver it straight to your door.



## Free expert advice

At Honey's we will be delighted to provide you with unlimited, free advice – we don't mind if you never, ever plan to become a customer. Moreover, you can also consult our Health Team (which includes vets, veterinary nurses and other experts) free of charge. We will be pleased to show you how to make your own food, too. We maintain a list of holistic vets, who we are happy to recommend.

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## Free book

If you want to know about canine health and nutrition, then please visit our website and download our free book *Honey's Natural Feeding Handbook for Dogs*, or contact us direct and, if you are based in the UK, we will pop a free copy in the post.

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## General information about raw feeding

There is growing evidence that dogs live longer, healthier and happier lives if they eat the same sort of diet they would enjoy in the wild. That is to say: raw, fresh meat, bones and vegetables. Such a diet is referred to as biologically appropriate *aka* natural feeding *aka* raw feeding *aka* (what a lot of things it is *also known as*) the BARF diet.

Dogs and their wolf cousins have been eating raw food for over a million years and they thrive on it. If your dog has any health issues, a raw food diet could make a huge difference. Benefits include a glossy coat, healthy skin, lean muscle tone, robust immune system, sweet-smelling breath, healthy teeth and gums, increased energy, better digestion and a strong heart.

Indeed, if your dog has any health issues now (even minor problems such as allergies, dry skin, bad breath and what the Americans refer to, euphemistically, as 'gas') it is quite likely that a switch to a raw food diet will clear them up.



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Parts of this text are revised extracts from *The Complete Book of Cat and Dog Health* (Hubble & Hattie 2019) by Dr Lise Hansen. [www.hubbleandhattie.com](http://www.hubbleandhattie.com)

The advice and information contained in this fact sheet is for guidance only. The Honey's Health Team (vets, veterinary nurses and other experts) is here to help you in any way we can. However, nothing can replace a physical examination by a vet or other qualified professional.