

Canine Luxating Patella and How Therapy Helps

Understanding the Condition and Supporting Mobility

What is a Luxating Patella?

A **luxating patella** (also known as a “slipping kneecap”) occurs when the **kneecap (patella)** moves out of its normal position within the groove at the end of the thigh bone (femur). This condition can affect one or both hind legs and may be **congenital (present from birth)** or **acquired** through injury or strain.

When the patella moves out of place, it can cause discomfort, altered movement, and long-term joint wear if left unmanaged.

Causes and Risk Factors

- Genetic predisposition (especially in small or toy breeds)
- Poor hind limb conformation or muscle imbalance
- Trauma or injury to the knee joint
- Shallow femoral groove

Veterinarians classify the condition into **four grades** depending on severity:

Grade I:

- The patella moves out of place occasionally but returns to position on its own.
- Often no visible lameness; may show brief skipping or hopping.

Grade II:

- The patella dislocates more easily and may remain out of place for short periods.
- Dog may show intermittent lameness or stiffness after activity.

Grade III:

- The patella is frequently out of place and can be manually repositioned.
- Noticeable, persistent lameness and altered gait are common.

Grade IV:

- The patella is permanently dislocated and cannot be manually repositioned.
- The limb may appear twisted or bowed, and the dog may avoid using it.

How Therapy Helps

While **surgical correction** may be necessary for higher grades, **osteopathic and massage therapy** can play a crucial role in **supporting comfort, improving mobility, and maintaining strength**, particularly in mild to moderate cases or post-surgery.

Therapeutic Benefits:

- **Reduces muscle tension:** Helps release tightness in the quadriceps and surrounding tissues that can worsen joint misalignment.
- **Improves joint flexibility:** Encourages better movement and comfort in the stifle and hip joints.
- **Enhances circulation and lymph flow:** Promotes healing and reduces inflammation.
- **Supports muscle balance:** Strengthens and relaxes key muscles to stabilise the knee.
- **Reduces compensatory strain:** Prevents overuse injuries in the hips, spine, or opposite limb.
- **Encourages relaxation and confidence in movement:** Helps the dog feel more comfortable and balanced.

When combined with **veterinary guidance and appropriate exercise**, therapy can greatly improve a dog's quality of life and reduce the risk of progression.

Aftercare and Management Tips

- Always follow your **veterinarian's treatment plan** and recommendations.
- Maintain a **healthy body weight** to minimise stress on joints.
- Provide **controlled, low-impact exercise** such as swimming or gentle lead walks.
- Use **non-slip flooring** at home to prevent sudden twisting or slipping.
- Schedule **regular therapy sessions** to support ongoing muscle health and comfort.
- Monitor for changes in gait, activity level, or signs of discomfort.

Therapy supports dogs with luxating patella by improving comfort, strengthening stabilising muscles, and helping them move more freely and confidently.