

Medial Luxating Patella (MLP)

The **medial luxating patella**, commonly called a trick knee, is an extremely common problem in toy breed dogs. An owner typically notices a little skip in the dog's step. The dog may even run on three legs, holding one hind leg up, and then miraculously be back on four legs as if nothing has happened. In fact, something has happened: the kneecap (patella) has slipped out of the smooth groove in which it normally rides up and down.

The patella, or 'kneecap,' is normally located in a groove on the end of the femur (thigh bone) just above the stifle (knee). The term **luxating** means 'out of place' or 'dislocated'. Therefore, a luxating patella is a kneecap that moves out of its normal location. Then, suddenly, they will be back on all four legs as if nothing happened.

It has slipped medially, which is to say towards the opposite leg, as opposed to laterally, which would be away from the dog entirely. With the patella dislocated (or luxated) medially, the knee cannot extend properly and stays bent. When the kneecap dislocates, it stops the knee from bending, causes a limp and rubs past the bone as it slips, which over time, can cause pain and arthritis.

Patella luxation can affect one or both knees, and varies from grade 1 to 4:

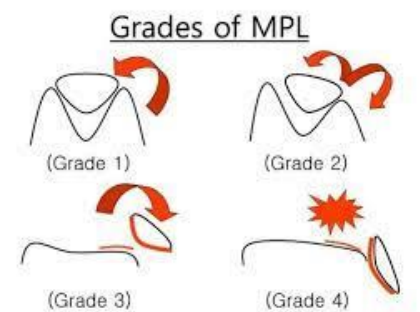
Grade 1: The kneecap is loose, but stays in the correct place when your dog moves around. It will dislocate if forced by your vet, but immediately returns when released.

Grade 2: The kneecap occasionally dislocates, but usually returns by itself; symptoms range from mild to moderate depending how regularly the kneecap dislocates.

Grade 3: The kneecap is permanently dislocated, can be pushed back into place by your vet, but slips straight out again when they let go.

Grade 4: The kneecap is permanently dislocated and is impossible to push back into place.

Contact your vet if you suspect your dog may have patella luxation. The sooner it's treated, the better your dog's outlook, and the less chance of arthritis in the future.



Diagnosis:

Your vet will carefully feel your dog's knee and perform various tests to check the stability of the kneecap. They will also check the cruciate ligaments because **cruciate disease** is common in dogs with patella luxation. Some dogs may need x-rays for a full diagnosis.

Treatment

The course of treatment will greatly depend on the grade of their patella luxation and their symptoms. If your dog only limps every now and again, it might be possible to manage their patella luxation with physiotherapy and exercise control. However, if your dog limps regularly or is in pain, surgery might be the best option.

Physiotherapy and exercise control. Most mild cases of patella luxation (grade 1&2), can be managed without surgery. Physiotherapy and controlled exercise help build-up the leg muscles and stop the kneecap slipping.

Surgery. Surgery is necessary for some dogs with patella luxation, especially if it is severe (grade 3&4). There are a few different surgical options your vet may recommend.

Considerations

Pain relief. Most dogs with patella luxation (with the exception of some grade 1's), experience pain at some point during their life. Your vet will be able to prescribe pain relief such as NSAID's to give as necessary.

Weight. Keeping your dog at the correct body weight reduces pressure on their joints, which can help with patella luxation and arthritis in the future. Check your **dog's weight and body condition** regularly, and make sure you feed them the right amount to keep them at a healthy weight.

Sensible exercise. Once your dog has recovered, they will be able to exercise more or less normally. To minimise the risk of further injury, it's best to avoid strenuous activities such as chasing, jumping and running up and down stairs/on uneven ground.

Supportive therapy. Your vet might recommend hydrotherapy or physiotherapy to help with your dog's ongoing recovery.

Susceptible Breeds

Patella luxation is more common in certain breeds, especially toy and small breeds. This is often because these breeds have bow-shaped legs or a shallow knee groove that doesn't hold the kneecap in place.

Breeds prone to patella luxation include:

- Miniature and toy poodles
- Yorkshire terriers
- Pomeranians
- Pekingese
- Chihuahuas
- Boston terriers
- Jack Russell Terrier
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier