# Joint Arthroscopy

- Joint arthroscopy is a diagnostic and/or therapeutic technique that allows the veterinarian to look inside your pet's joints through a very small skin incision.
- A pet's joints can be examined for signs of degeneration or trauma. In some cases, therapeutic procedures can be performed.
- Recovery time from arthroscopic versus "open" joint surgery is generally easier and shorter.
- The procedure is minimally invasive, but the pet must be under anesthesia.

## What Is Joint Arthroscopy?

An arthroscope is a specially designed instrument that allows a veterinarian to look inside joints using a tiny, sterile, illuminated fiber-optic camera. Arthroscopy is a minimally invasive procedure that can be used to examine joint structures for signs of degeneration and trauma without having to perform open surgery on a joint. It can be used for both diagnostic and therapeutic purposes. For example, if a veterinarian is examining your pet's joint for signs of degeneration, he or she can remove painful cartilage fragments or bone chips as part of the procedure.

## How Is It Performed?

Because joint arthroscopy requires anesthesia, your veterinarian may recommend pre-anesthetic blood work and other pre-anesthetic testing before performing joint arthroscopy for your pet.

Before performing joint arthroscopy, the patient is placed under anesthesia. All hair is removed from the skin over the joint (to avoid introducing hair particles into the joint) and the skin is cleaned thoroughly with a surgical scrub solution to kill bacteria and other germs. The area around the joint is covered with sterile surgical drapes, to reduce the risk of accidentally introducing bacteria into the joint. Finally, the veterinarian scrubs his or her hands before dressing in a sterile surgical gown and sterile gloves.

One or two tiny incisions are made through the skin and into the joint to allow access for the sterile camera and instruments. A sterile saline solution is then typically pumped into the area to inflate the joint. This helps the veterinarian visualize the area. Once the scope is inserted, the veterinarian can examine the joint with the illuminated camera. Special lenses allow areas of interest to be magnified and images captured (photographed) for later review.

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Small surgical instruments can also be inserted through the incision to allow the veterinarian to perform therapeutic procedures.

## What Is It Used For?

Arthroscopy is useful because it can allow a veterinarian to directly visualize areas that cannot be examined completely using x-rays or ultrasound. Diagnostic and therapeutic arthroscopy can be performed in virtually any joint, including the elbow, hip, shoulder, and knee.

Medical conditions that can be diagnosed using arthroscopy include:

- Elbow dysplasia
- Hip dysplasia
- Arthritis
- Cruciate ligament injuries
- Other ligament injuries

Arthroscopy can be used to help determine if a patient is a good candidate for certain orthopedic

procedures. It can help your veterinarian assess the amount of joint degeneration and help determine which surgical option for treatment may be the most appropriate.

## Benefits of Arthroscopy

The recovery time for pets after an arthroscopic procedure has been performed is generally brief compared to recovery time for pets that have undergone open joint surgery. Rather than a large incision, arthroscopy requires only one or two small incisions to be made in the skin. Many pets experience minimal discomfort after the procedure. Arthroscopy also causes less disruption of fragile tissues surrounding the joint and as a result there is a reduced chance of swelling. An additional benefit is that diagnostic or therapeutic arthroscopy may negate the need for a more invasive surgery if a problem can be accurately diagnosed and treated.

Despite the fact that arthroscopy is a minimally invasive procedure and your pet may experience little to no discomfort afterwards, it is very important to carefully follow your veterinarian's instructions regarding recovery, including any limitations placed on activity.