

Conservative Management of Fragmented Medial Coronoid Process Disease (FMCP) in Dogs - Owner Information Handout

Laurie Edge-Hughes

BScPT, MAnimSt, CAFCI, CCRT, CSmAnimAcu/DryNeedling
The Canine Fitness Centre Ltd.

Understanding Your Dog's Condition

Fragmented medial coronoid process disease (also called FMCP or part of medial coronoid disease / medial compartment disease) is a common elbow problem in young, large- and giant-breed dogs. It involves cracking, fragmentation, or wear of a small piece of bone and cartilage in the elbow joint. This leads to pain, limping, cartilage damage, and eventual osteoarthritis (OA).

The condition is mostly **developmental**, linked to genetics, fast growth, and how the bones in the elbow grow at slightly different rates (called incongruity). This puts extra stress on the inner part of the elbow. Repetitive activity can worsen it, but a single big injury is rarely the main cause.

Timeline of what happens inside the joint:

- **Early growth (up to 6 months):** Bones around the elbow grow unevenly, causing overload on the medial coronoid.
- **Stress builds (4–8 months):** Tiny damage to bone and cartilage starts, with mild inflammation.
- **Fissuring/fragmentation (5–12 months):** Cracks appear or a piece may loosen.
- **Ongoing changes:** More inflammation, cartilage wear, and OA develops over time.

Good news: Catching it early gives the best chance to manage it conservatively. Many dogs do well with a thoughtful non-surgical plan focused on reducing stress, controlling pain and swelling, supporting joint repair, and building strength. Studies show that in mild-to-moderate cases, a good conservative program can give similar long-term function and owner satisfaction as surgery.

Goals of This Home Program

- Protect the elbow while it heals & while bones finish growing.
- Reduce inflammation and pain.
- Support cartilage health through nutrition and gentle loading.
- Build muscle stability.
- Slow down osteoarthritis progression.
- Help your dog return to a happy, active life.

Success depends on early action, consistency, weight control, and regular check-ins with your vet and rehab therapist.

Supplements for Joint Health

Joint supplements give the building blocks for cartilage repair (type II collagen and protective molecules called proteoglycans).

Daily recommendations (general guidance – follow your vet’s specific advice):

- Hydrolyzed collagen peptides: Around 200 mg per kg body weight per day (or 5–20 grams total depending on size).
- Glucosamine HCl: 15–30 mg/kg/day (higher “loading” dose for the first 4–6 weeks).
- Chondroitin sulfate: 15–30 mg/kg/day.
- Omega-3 fatty acids (EPA + DHA): 50–100 mg/kg combined per day.
- Green-lipped mussel extract: About 77 mg/kg/day.
- Supportive nutrients: Vitamin C (10–30 mg/kg), manganese (0.5–1 mg/kg), MSM (20–50 mg/kg), avocado/soybean unsaponifiables (10–20 mg/kg).
- Undenatured type II collagen: 10–40 mg per day (size-dependent).

Give supplements with meals. Focus on higher therapeutic amounts during the repair phase and maintenance levels long-term. Keeping your dog at an ideal weight is one of the most important things you can do to reduce elbow stress.

Phase 1: Acute Control (First 1–4 Weeks or Until Stable)

Goal: Settle pain and swelling, protect the joint.

What to do at home:

- **Rest:** Crate or room rest with very short leash walks only (start with 5 minutes, 2 times a day). No running, jumping, uncontrolled stairs, or rough play.
- **Support:** Use non-slip mats, and consider elevated food/water bowls.
- **Modalities (at clinic):** Laser therapy, PEMF, shockwave therapy, and ultrasound as recommended.
- **Home manual care:** Gentle massage (light stroking) around the elbow and shoulder. Gentle passive range-of-motion bending & extending (only if pain-free and taught by your therapist).
- **Supplements:** Emphasize anti-inflammatory options (i.e. omega-3s and green-lipped mussel) plus cartilage supports.
- **Monitoring:** Watch for limping, swelling, or reluctance to move. Contact your care provider if things worsen.

Phase 2: Repair and Remodeling (Weeks 4–12)

Goal: Introduce safe movement to help healing and build stability.

Home exercises (start only when cleared by your rehab therapist):

- Gradually increase leash walks (10–15+ minutes, 2–3 times daily).
- Simple balance exercises: Balancing on stable then unstable surfaces (3-leg stands progressing to Diagonal-leg stands)
- Hydrotherapy sessions (underwater treadmill or swimming) – excellent for elbow movement with low impact.
- Gentle inclines
- Figure-8 walking or weave poles
- Low cavaletti poles

Continue modalities as indicated.

Continues joint supplementation.

Keep doing gentle massage and range-of-motion work.

Phase 3: Strengthening and Maintenance (Month 3 Onward)

Goal: Build long-term resilience and keep your dog active and comfortable.

Ongoing activities:

- Regular controlled walks with purposeful variety (i.e. hills).
- Continued balance and strengthening exercises as your dog progresses.
- Maintain muscle strength around the elbow and whole body to help compensate for any incongruity.
- Intermittent use of therapies such as modalities or acupuncture to focus on osteoarthritis prevention or treatment

Creative tips from my experience:

- Address tight muscles in the neck, shoulders, or back that often develop as compensation.
- Watch for flare-ups and return to shorter walks or more rest when needed.

Long-term lifestyle:

- Lifelong weight management.
- Consistent joint supplementation.
- Regular vet and rehab check-ups.
- Avoid high-impact activities that overload the elbows (e.g., repetitive jumping).

What to Expect and When to Get Help

In early cases, many dogs show good improvement in comfort and movement within weeks to months. You may not eliminate all OA changes, but excellent quality of life is very achievable. Full reversal of advanced damage is unlikely, but we can often slow progression significantly.

Contact your vet or rehab therapist if you notice:

- Increased limping or non-weight bearing.
- Swelling or heat in the elbow.
- Sudden reluctance to move or eat.
- Any signs of pain (panting, restlessness, irritability).

Final Thoughts

This program combines protection, controlled loading, hands-on care, modalities like laser therapy, and nutrition to give your dog the best chance at a strong recovery. Be patient and consistent – small daily efforts add up!

Always work closely with your veterinarian and a certified canine rehabilitation practitioner for personalized adjustments, re-evaluation, imaging follow-up, and hands-on guidance. This handout is for educational purposes and is not a replacement for professional veterinary care.

We're here to help your dog thrive!