

Orthopaedics
Oncology

Medicine
Dermatology

Soft tissue surgery
Specialist Imaging

Cardiology
Anaesthesia

Neurology
Physiotherapy

Wound Management

Open wounds occur fairly frequently in active dogs and cats. In most cases, wounds occur after some sort of injury but occasionally open wounds develop following surgical site infection. Most wounds are easily managed by your own vet in general practice. However sometimes management of major wounds is best done in a hospital where daily dressing changes and wound lavage can be performed in addition to regular pain relief and monitoring of nutrition and healing. Large wounds, or wounds that are not healing according to the normal time frame may be referred for Specialist management. In some situations, we manage the wound and then perform reconstructive surgery to close the wound more quickly using skin grafts or skin flaps.

Skin grafts are indicated for healthy non infected wounds on the lower limb (see photograph) where the skin loss is extensive and the wound will not be able to heal without help. Once the wound is healthy, a patch of skin is removed from the body wall and transferred to the limb. The leg is then bandaged to keep the skin graft very still while it heals onto its new site. Patients are usually hospitalised for several days during this early healing phase as they must not move around too much or dislodge the graft. Dressing changes may still be required while the graft fully heals into its new position and these can often be done as an outpatient with us or at your own vet. (Figure 1)



Skin flaps are indicated for larger injuries or for reconstruction following removal of tumours (cancer). The skin flap has a base with an artery and vein supplying the skin to keep it healthy. It is moved around to cover the wound and then sutured into place. Skin flaps do not easily reach far down the limb, so they are usually used around the face, neck, body and trunk. Usually only a few days hospitalisation is required after this surgery.

Finally some wounds are best managed as an open wound, to allow the body to heal the injury itself. The wound is kept covered to keep it clean and moist and prevent tissue damage from self trauma or infection or drying out. There is a myth that animals lick their wounds to improve wound healing – unfortunately this is not the case, and grooming or licking at wounds often causes infection or further damage to the wound delaying healing. For large wounds, a VAC (Vacuum assisted closure) device may be used (see Figure 2). This is a dressing that has a steady light vacuum applied 24 hours/day to pull fluid through the wound and encourage healing and contraction. It is comfortable and well tolerated by patients, although they do have to remain in hospital for the duration of the VAC application. Usually the dressing only has to be changed every 3-5 days, which is easier to manage than daily changes.



The Soft Tissue Surgery service are always happy to see chronic wounds and advise regarding options for closure or management. Some patients can be managed as outpatients with their own vet providing local support with our advice.

Extraordinary People
Exceptional Care

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