

We all know our four-legged friends are a central part of our families, but what about those with only three?

# Tripawds



Vader, a French Bulldog

Caroline Murphy set up the Tripawds UK Facebook page a year ago after seeing the support that the American parent website offered to its members. The online communities on both sides of the pond provide members with a space to chat and share the experiences of dogs who have had limbs amputated. The groups aim to dispel the myth that tripawds are disabled or are more hassle to deal with than 'normal' dogs.

The American contingent was founded in 2006 by Jim Nelson and Rene Agredano, after the couple began blogging about their German Shepherd, Jerry, who had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and underwent a leg amputation to preserve his quality of life.

Rene says, "This global community is a fun way for pet parents to share information and support others who are facing the difficult decision to amputate to improve their animals' quality of life."

Caroline's French Bulldog, Vader, became the international correspondent for the American site. Vader had lost his leg before Caroline adopted him, but the lack of a leg didn't put her off.

Caroline says, "Many dogs are euthanised because people don't think the animals can cope on three legs, or feel they are not a proper dog."

There are a variety of reasons why a dog might have to undergo a limb amputation and, as vet Joe Inglis explains, limb removals are not uncommon.

"Limb amputations are relatively frequent in veterinary practice," he says. "The most common causes are traumatic injuries secondary to road traffic accidents and cancerous growths on limbs."

At the end of June this year, Joanna Simm's Greyhound, Spud, fell while running around the garden with her four other dogs.

Joanna says, "Spud broke

his right hind leg so badly, it was unfixable. We were at our wits' end, but Tripawds UK were literally lifesavers with constant support and messages of hope."

Spud had his limb amputated in July. After a lunchtime operation, he was able to come home that evening and picked himself up just 48 hours later. He was a tad wobbly, but Spud's vet said this was more to do with the anaesthetic lingering than the removal of his leg.

As with any major surgery, the recovery period was not plain sailing, but it was to be expected.

## First steps

Joanna says, "The first night was awful as, being a 'skinny' breed, he had a bad time coming fully out of the anaesthetic - he was hallucinating and panicking, but just for a few hours. The next couple of days were hard, too - finding his balance and confidence - but it came pretty fast after that."

"The next problem was that his remaining hind leg swelled and became weak and wobbly again, but this sorted itself out after a couple of days."

Spud's vet gave the family lots of advice, including how to distinguish between old blood from the bruising, and fresh bleeding, meaning Joanna's family were able to approach Spud's recovery calmly.

Some dogs need to undergo an amputation due to a deformity at birth. Yorkshire Terrier Pelucchi was born with his front left paw split in two, and the same leg was bent and shorter than the others. At first his vet thought he would not suffer any pain and so decided to see how he would cope, but after a few months it was evident to owner Zoe Le Carpentier that he was not comfortable. His leg was amputated at six months, and although he doesn't seem to mind, Zoe keeps a close eye on

Paddy, a Border Collie



him while allowing him to be as active as possible.

Zoe says, "I have recently invested in some boots for him. I keep his nails short to reduce any discomfort and keep the hair trimmed between his pads."

Another main cause of amputation in dogs is osteosarcoma, cancer of the bone. The condition can cause dogs severe pain, and amputation is often offered as a form of pain relief, rather than a guarantee of a prolonged life.

Val Barton's crossbreed, Sparky, underwent a hind limb amputation in April after being diagnosed with osteosarcoma. He had been limping for some time and vets had suspected that an earlier knee injury was the cause. Unfortunately, tests revealed a tumour.

#### Lease of life

Val lives in Italy and Sparky's leg was amputated just above the knee, which has left him with a stump. In the UK, the entire limb is usually removed. Sparky did develop an infection, but Val and her family were able to treat this and the wound soon healed.

Val, who is involved in rescue, says, "I think when a dog has to have a limb removed, we suffer as much, if not more, than they do. Dogs do not suffer trauma in the same way we do."

Five years ago, Emma Bartlett's Rottweiler, Tara, was diagnosed with osteosarcoma and given just months to live. Her vet suggested amputation as pain relief as part of Tara's palliative care, and she is still going strong today.

As a dog owner, Emma knew the signs to watch out for that would show if Tara was suffering.

She explains, "If Tara was off her food, we would definitely know."

As a vet nurse, Emma is able to provide fellow Tripawd UK members with her professional advice.

She says, "I'm often asked, 'Should the wound look like this?' and other questions. Unless you've got a dog yourself, it can be really difficult to understand exactly what an owner is going through."

"Having gone through it, I do think an individual's feelings



Tara, a Rottweiler



Frankie, a Staffordshire Bull Terrier

have to come into it, but it does not have to be a death sentence."

It is not uncommon for tripawds to end up in rescue. Snowy the Lurcher was rehomed by Hope Rescue in south Wales after her owners decided they would rather she was euthanised than look after a dog with three legs, and Frankie the Staffordshire Bull Terrier's first owner made the same decision after breaking the nine-week-old's leg after he had an accident in the house.

Frankie now lives with Lynne Williams, who says, "He had been left for a week apparently before his owner took him to the vet and left him to be put to

sleep. Thankfully, the vet didn't put him to sleep but treated him for his injuries, but sadly had to amputate his front left leg."

Losing a leg hasn't stopped Frankie from earning the nickname 'pocket rocket'. Lynne says, "He runs as fast and jumps as high, if not higher, than our other two. He adores life and lives each day to the limit. We are forever thankful to the vet who chose to give him life as a tripawd instead of putting him to sleep, otherwise we would never have had the privilege of knowing this beautiful little boy."

The concern that a three-legged dog might be more expensive to care for and the lack of funds to pay for surgery

are major causes in tripawds entering rescue, but this isn't the case, particularly if your dog is insured.

Nicky Eccles from specialist pet insurance broker VIP says, "Three-legged dogs are fully insurable under normal terms, particularly where the leg was lost due to accident or injury. For those pet owners looking for a new policy, exclusions should only apply if the leg was lost or surgically removed due to an underlying illness or condition that could reoccur."

"For those facing the amputation of a pet's limb, the cost of the procedure should be fully covered, provided insurance is already in place and beyond the inception period of the policy."

"Dogs are unbelievably adaptable following the loss of a leg and will happily lead a normal life, barely affected by their disability, and VIP would encourage their adoption without hesitation."

The vast majority of dogs take to having three legs quickly and maintain an active lifestyle.

Vet Joe Inglis, says, "The operations are usually reasonably straightforward and surgical complications are uncommon - but the most surprising fact is how well pets usually cope with losing a limb."



Joanne Cleeve with three-legged clients Taro, Peleuchi and Haatchi

Unlike people, where there are usually psychological issues to contend with, pets seem to just get on with life and take their disability in their stride (no pun intended!). I have seen so many pets, particularly dogs, who live full and active lives despite having lost limbs, so although an amputation is clearly a major operation and not without significant consequences, the long-term outlook for pets after an amputation is often very positive."

Joe adds, "One factor that can make a difference is which limb is removed. Losing a front leg is usually more serious, as dogs and cats carry 60 per cent of their body weight on the front legs, whereas the back legs provide more of the energy for running."

Paddy, a Border Collie rescued by Joan Gibson, lost his front left limb as a pup after a wound became gangrenous. Joan didn't consider his missing leg as something to hold her back from

adopting him, and he slotted right in with her other collies and lives just as active a life.

Joan says, "We take him to the hydrotherapy pool and he does agility and flyball. He picked up doing the jumps really quickly. Nothing stops him doing anything."

### A leg up

Hollywood star Jessica Chastain, who was Oscar-nominated for her role in *The Help*, told me her rescue tripawd Chaplin was in no way restricted by his missing front limb. Jessica says, "Chaplin brings so much joy to my life. I love to take him to the park and play catch. He's the fastest dog I've ever had. He wears his tripawd look with pride."

Following amputation, there are complementary therapies that can aid recovery and keep a tripawd active. Joanne Cleeve, a canine massage therapist, says it's important to pay attention to the remaining limbs, as they will compensate for the amputated

one. She recommends glucosamine supplements to aid joints, green-lipped mussel for arthritis, and collagen for those who have suffered ligament or tissue damage, but points out it's important to give the correct dosage for maximum effect.

Joanne says, "Massage can be really beneficial for recovery; it can improve lymphatic drainage and reduce swelling, and can also break down and remodel scar tissue caused by strains or tears to muscle. Myofascial release can help ease the over-compensation of the neck and shoulders."

A qualified therapist can help to devise a plan to ensure a tripawd's needs are met. Joanne talks to clients about everything from diet and exercise habits to flooring in the house, and recommends an orthopaedic bed to help distribute a tripawd's weight.

"We give a full muscle health-check where we can analyse a dog's gait and pacing, and see which muscles are overcompensating."

There are other devices that can help the life of a tripawd. Caroline notices Vader tires more quickly than her other Frenchies, but has devised a way to take them out together.

"He has a pram, which we call his 'chariot'! We go to the park every day and he does his 10 minutes of running around faster than the others, then he sits down and does the rest of the walk in his pram."

Joanna attributes Spud's recovery, in part, to his harness, saying, "I used the fabulous Ruffwear harness for the first few weeks for extra support."

But none could be without the support from the Tripawd UK network.

Joanna adds, "That group has been an absolute lifesaver, and I think everyone will say the same." ■

## Need support?

If your dog is facing a limb amputation, don't panic. Talk the procedure through with your vet and ask what impact the loss of a leg is likely to have on your dog's life. Ask what aftercare will be given at the vet's, and what you'll need to do at home.

Kelly Turley, Snowy's owner, says, "Everything was small steps with Snowy, and taking things at her pace. The nurses at our vet practice were fantastic. One told me about the first time Snowy got up out of her bed after the amputation. When she went to get back in she got totally stuck, as she could not work out why her amputated leg wasn't moving. Her muscles were twitching but obviously the leg was gone, so they had to help her."

Find out about any complementary therapies that may help, such as hydrotherapy, physiotherapy, canine massage and supplements.

And if you just want to talk with a group of people who have been there, have a chat with the fellow owners on Tripawds UK.

### Find out more

**Tripawds UK**  
[www.facebook.com/groups/tripawdsuk/](http://www.facebook.com/groups/tripawdsuk/)

**Tripawds.com**  
[www.tripawds.com](http://www.tripawds.com)



Grace, by Rosanne Coombes

## Could you give Grace a home?

Grace is an intelligent and sensitive dog who has some basic training, including sit, stay and wait, and she knows her name. She loves people and is an affectionate girl. Hope's rescue coordinator says, "Grace is from the west Wales pound and, as far as I am aware, she was found with three legs, so we don't know how she ended up like that. She is two to three years old and is a very calm and cuddly girl. She has a worried side to her - she's more worried of men than women - and although she likes dogs when out and about, she would probably be best as the only dog in the home, as she is so demanding of attention."

Call 07545 822919, email [enquiries@hoperescue.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@hoperescue.org.uk) or visit [www.hoperescue.org.uk](http://www.hoperescue.org.uk)