

Total Ear Canal Ablation

Your vet has arranged for me to see your pet for a surgical procedure called a *Total Ear Canal Ablation (with Lateral Bulla Osteotomy)*. This operation is performed to remove the ear canal either because of chronic ear disease/infections or occasionally to remove a tumour that has occurred in the ear canal. As part of the procedure the middle ear cavity is opened and flushed out, so it is also used to treat some cases of middle ear infection.

For ear infections, we would refer to this procedure as a *salvage procedure*, in other words, it is a last resort when it has proved impossible to treat the ear problem successfully in other ways. The surgery is an extremely effective way to solve the ear problems, so when a pet has been suffering with a painful, infected ear for some time and other kinds of treatment have failed, it is a sensible choice.

If the surgery is performed on both ears, then your pet will be almost completely deaf after surgery. This is not usually a problem, but you may need to be careful about letting your dog get out of sight on a walk (e.g. in woods) and you may need to be more careful around roads as your dog will not hear cars coming.

After surgery, there will be no ear opening present. The ear flap (pinna) is not removed – in dogs with flop ears (e.g. Spaniels, Labradors) the appearance after surgery is excellent – it is not obvious that surgery has been performed. In prick-eared dogs (e.g. German Shepherds) the surgery may result in a change in ear carriage.

The risks of surgery are mostly related to important structures that are near to the ear canal and are at risk of damage during the surgery. Bleeding can be troublesome as the ear canal lies next to a large artery which may be damaged. Bleeding is usually controlled during surgery and is not usually life-threatening.

The *facial nerve* is also near to the ear canal and may be traumatised during the surgery. This results in facial paralysis – loss of movement of the muscles of one side of the face. The main concern if this occurs is that blinking is reduced, and it may be necessary to lubricate your pet's eye with drops for a period after surgery. The function of the facial muscles usually returns over a few weeks.

Occasionally patients suffer symptoms like vertigo after this surgery and lose their balance for a period of time. This can also cause nausea and vomiting. This is very uncommon, but when it occurs it may be necessary to hospitalise the patient for nursing care and to treat them with medication to reduce the nausea.

The recovery from the surgery is normally fairly quick. Painkillers will be given for approximately 10 days to two weeks, and there may be skin stitches to be removed after about 10 days. The success rate of this surgery is very high. Longer term, there is a small risk of a *discharging sinus* forming where a grumbling infection causes a wound to appear and release pus. This may require further surgery to flush out the deep-seated infection.

There is a small risk associated with a general anaesthetic. Your vet may discuss with you whether you would like your dog to have a blood test prior to surgery to ensure that there are no underlying health problems that we were unaware of.

Although there are some important risks to this procedure that you need to be aware of, it is also important to remember that chronic ear pain is very unpleasant, and if it has not been possible to treat this successfully in another way, then the surgery is likely to make your pet much more comfortable and happy.

Thank you for entrusting the care of your pet to us, and I look forward to speaking to you on the day of the procedure.

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