



# Leo gets his bounce in a hightech way

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Leo's dynamic external fixators are retraining his leg muscles.

Photo: Basia Pioro McGuire

A bouncing four-month-old with a soft black and white coat and gleaming eyes, Leo the pup is sharp as a whip. The handsome little guy has already learned how to sit, lie down and stand up, eager to be a good boy.

And thanks to a procedure he has just undergone, he is now more than just a clever youngster. While Leo is not exactly bionic, he's not far off.

Young Leo was diagnosed with a rare condition in his hind legs commonly known as slipped hocks. The condition, known in medical terms as hyperextension syndrome or tarsal hyperextension, is a hyperextension of the talocrural, also known as the tarsal, hock or ankle, joint.

"A dog affected with this appears to look as if it is walking on tip toes and the condition results in a non-painful lameness," said Dr. Colin Manson of Cayman Animal Hospital.

In Leo's case, the hyperextension was locking his ankle joint, turning his knees inward causing a pigeon-toed gait when he walked. Instead of trotting, Leo resorted to bunny hopping. Dr. Colin says he has only seen three cases of slipped hocks in his professional career, and the consensus is that it does not resolve itself over time.

But Leo had a stroke of good fortune. Cayman Animal Rescue Enthusiasts, a local non-profit group, stepped in to help. The group has appealed to the public donate their spare change to defer the cost of ground-breaking surgery, to help retrain the muscle groups in Leo's legs.

Last week, Dr. Colin inserted four pins into the bone at specific points on each of Leo's hind legs. Then two bars were attached to the pins to hold them in place. All that was left were a pair of little boots with rings on the loes and some elastic bands.

The contraptions are called dynamic external fixators, as they allow limited movement. With the elastic bands attached to the pins gently pulling Leo's legs into the correct position, the idea is to allow Leo's legs to get used to moving in the normal range of motion.

Left in place for up to three to four weeks, they should prevent the hyperextension from happening again. Soon, he'll be able to run and play just like a normal dog.

Though they may look rather drastic, Dr. Colin says once in place the fixators are not painful.

"Leo may feel some discomfort in the soft tissues, but once those pins are in there, they don't hurt because they don't move," he explained, with assurances that Leo is on painkillers and other medications to ensure he's comfortable.

"He'll be a little sore, but he'll be fine."

Indeed, little Leo was his usual bouncy self only a day after the surgery, prancing around the hospital with newly acquired ease.

"We are doing our best to treat him like he's normal and not fuss over him too much so he doesn't get spoiled," said Dr. Colin.

Gauging from the coos and cuddles Leo gets wherever he goes, however, that seems highly unlikely.

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