

Dear Dr. Wise:

Question: Butch, my little terrier, was playing in the yard the other day. He seemed to be in frisky condition. Suddenly, however, he let out a yelp and held up his right rear leg. He couldn't use it at all. I rushed him to the veterinarian who said he ruptured his anterior cruciate ligament. He is keeping Butch in his hospital for further examination. I'm curious, is this the same knee injury that athletes sometimes have?

Answer: Yes, human athletes can suffer from the same injury. A dog's knee (stifle) joint is a miniature of ours. When subjected to certain stress, the joint can sustain ruptured or torn ligaments and torn cartilage.

Your veterinarian probably sedated Butch to relax the muscles so he could examine him and confirm the rupture diagnosis. Injured athletes, and sometimes animals, can be diagnosed with arthroscopy. The procedure involves inserting a fiber optic light through tiny holes so the doctor can actually see the rupture.

Treatment depends on how severe the injury is. If it is a relatively minor strain, the dog may be confined for about 10-12 days to rest the injury.

Surgery may be required to repair a more serious tear in the ligament.

I hope Butch has a quick recovery. Unfortunately, active dogs, especially the ones with "stout" rear legs like terriers, are more prone to this injury than other dogs. They run hard and turn sharply and the ligaments or cartilage give way.

If you have a question, write Dr. Wise, Indiana Veterinary Medical Association, 201 S. Capitol Avenue, Suite 405, Indianapolis, IN, 46225, or www.invma.org