

# Lumps on the Lower Legs or Paws



Growths or masses on the legs below the elbow on the front legs and the knee (stifle) on the hind leg can present unique challenges when considering removal. The majority of the lower portion of the limb are mostly tendons, ligaments, bone and vessels with minimal muscular tissue, the skin is also tighter (does not have as much “give” for stretching) and closing even the smallest wound left after a mass removal can present many challenges.

It is important to talk with your primary veterinarian in detail about masses on the lower limb. It is also important to know if the mass is benign or cancerous (malignant). If cancerous, it is also important to know the cancer type (mast cell tumor, sarcoma (multiple-types), etc). The appropriate work up should be performed on any growth on the lower limb before ***surgical intervention intended for cure*** is considered, because complete cure may involve something as invasive as either toe or [partial] limb amputation. Surgery intended for cure could also require the use of skin grafts or skin flaps. For mass removal of any growth that is of significant size, consultation with a ***boarded veterinary surgeon*** is always recommended [see what is a boarded specialist handout]

## ***DIAGNOSTIC WORK UP***

An appropriate work up may include trial treatment first with antibiotics +/- steroids to decrease inflammation or resolve infection making the mass appear larger. If infection is not present, a fine needle aspirate (FNA) is the first diagnostic step. Additional diagnostic tests may include radiographs (x-rays) of the affected limb & possibly chest radiographs if a malignant mass is suspected. If a conclusive answer cannot be gained from these diagnostic tests, your veterinarian may perform an “incisional”, “punch”, or possibly an “excisional” biopsy with histopathology (microscopic diagnosis) of the growth to gather more information.

## ***POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS***

With excisional biopsies, it is important to be aware of potential complications because lower limbs lack subcutaneous tissue and excess skin usually needed for incision closure. Closure of mass excisions or even lacerations on the lower limb by nature have increased tension on the sutures. Increased tension lower limb incisions can lead to wound dehiscence (sutures coming apart & wound coming open); as well as vasculitis (inflammation of blood vessels) and swelling below the incision secondary to too much tension constricting the vessels and lymphatic drainage.

Because pets with lower limb surgery are usually sent home in a bandage, owner compliance and at home bandage care are exceedingly important. Bandages present their own fair share of potential complications including, bandage slippage, infection underneath the bandage, or if the bandage has become too tight. Please be sure to read the handout on at home bandage care.

For additional information about masses on your pet please visit the following articles:

- [Suspicious Lump on Your Dog? Here's When to Tell the Vet](#) by Petful
- [Soft Tissue Sarcomas](#) written by VCA
- [Soft Tissue Sarcoma](#) by Fitzpatrick Referrals written by VCA
- [Fibrosarcoma](#) written by VCA