

# Treating greyhound injuries – the right approach

## Guiding statement

GRNSW advocates using an evidence based approach to injury prevention and treatment that is consistent with industry standards in veterinary rehabilitation and sports medicine and protecting animal welfare. The goals of injury treatment and rehabilitation include:

- controlling inflammation
- decreasing pain
- facilitating tissue regeneration
- minimising scar tissue
- reducing muscle wasting
- encouraging early return to function and
- promoting positive psychological effects

## Background

Several practices have historically been used in injured greyhounds in the belief that they will more rapidly bring about healing. However, they can cause pain, suffering and delay healing and return to function. Some of these practices include pin-firing, freeze-firing, blistering and sclerosing. It is also illegal to undertake some of these practices in certain circumstances.

## Obligations of greyhound owners and trainers

When pursuing the treatment of an injured greyhound, it is important that owners and trainers understand:

- their legal obligations not to inflict unjustified or unnecessary pain and distress to a greyhound
- their moral obligation to avoid pain and suffering by providing rapid access to pain relief, veterinary care and the avoidance of painful practices
- their obligation to do no harm to an animal including in the pursuit of treatment

- the current evidence for effective treatment of greyhound injuries

## Definitions

- Pin-firing – procedure using a hot probe to cauterise injured muscles, tendons and bones
- Freeze firing – procedure using a liquid nitrogen cooled probe to cauterise injured tendons, ligaments and bones.
- Blistering – application of an irritant over the skin surrounding a tendon, ligament or bone injury.  
Sometimes applied after pin-firing
- Sclerosing – injection of an irritant into an injured ligament, tendon or muscle

## The use of pin-firing, freeze-firing, blistering & sclerosing

Historically the procedures of pin-firing, freeze-firing, blistering and sclerosing have been used on muscle, tendon, ligament and bone injuries in the belief that it would cure chronic injury through stimulation of an acute inflammatory reaction. It has been claimed that this is achieved through stimulating blood supply, stabilising joints and strengthening of tendons and ligaments and alleviating “pain triggers”.

These procedures cause pain and discomfort and there is no evidence that they result in outcomes superior to what would have been achieved by the body’s natural healing mechanisms.

Furthermore, these procedures cause unnecessary trauma to normal tissue and adhesion between the injured and surrounding tissues. This can result in restricted joint movement which affects locomotion and may lead to ongoing muscular pain.

Open wounds or burns caused by “blistering” irritants leads to prolonged healing and reduced use of the limb. This leads to muscle wasting in that limb and rapidly reduces the mechanical properties of tendon and ligament tissue resulting in a higher risk of ligament or tendon failure and slower return to function.

Therefore, there is no evidence to support that these procedures would improve tendon or ligament strength. The addition of local anaesthetic in some sclerosing or blistering products is not likely to provide appropriate pain relief for the duration of inflammation and pain caused by the agent.

Undertaking any invasive or therapeutic procedure without the proper anaesthesia and pain relief is not consistent with current welfare standards. Furthermore, there is a lack of evidence that these procedures lead to a return to function superior to that achieved intrinsically.

These procedures should not be entered into under any circumstance. Instead veterinary rehabilitation and animal physical therapy should be sought as these offer a multi modal approach incorporating veterinary surgical and medicine management with modalities such as manual therapy, transcutaneous electrical neuromuscular

stimulation (TENS), neuromuscular electrical stimulation (NMES), underwater treadmill, hydrotherapy, therapeutic ultrasound and laser therapy.

It is an offence under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act to unjustifiably and unnecessarily inflict pain on a greyhound.

- (2) For the purposes of this Act, a reference to an act of cruelty committed upon an animal includes a reference to any act or omission as a consequence of which the animal is unreasonably, unnecessarily or unjustifiably:
- (a) beaten, kicked, killed, wounded, pinioned, mutilated, maimed, abused, tormented, tortured, terrified or infuriated,
  - (b) over-loaded, over-worked, over-driven, over-ridden or over-used,
  - (c) exposed to excessive heat or excessive cold, or
  - (d) **inflicted with pain.**

## Pin-firing

Pin-firing is against the law. Section 21A of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act states:

### **Firing prohibited**

A person who applies a thermal stimulus (such as hot wires) to the leg of an animal with the intention of causing tissue damage and the development of scar tissue around tendons and ligaments of the leg is guilty of an offence.