

Soak Dog's Broken Nail and Bandage

Dogs' nails grow back with appropriate care.

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Q. Somehow, my 3-year-old Jack Russell Terrier totally broke off one of his toenails – all the way down. Do you think it will grow back?

A. Fortunately, nails will grow back after they break off, just as they do in humans. But a fractured nail can be painful, so if your Jack Russell is limping around, he would probably benefit from some pain medication. In our ER, we usually soak the foot in diluted disinfectant, apply a padded bandage, and send home some anti-inflammatory pain medication such as Rimadyl.

You could probably do a foot soak at home just using clean, warm water. If you have any Betadine disinfectant, add a few drops to make the water the color of weak ice tea.

Apply a light wrap using some gauze sponges and elastic bandage material, held in place with some white medical tape. Of course, dogs will try to chew the bandage off, so an Elizabethan collar is also necessary. It's usually safe to give dogs aspirin for up to three days, at a dose of about 5 mg per pound twice a day. If you go at a higher dose, or any longer, there is a risk of bleeding stomach ulcers.

After three days or so, remove the bandage so the new nail can start growing in.

Fractured nails are relatively simple problems, but they can be painful or become infected, so it's important to treat them appropriately.