

# CONGENITAL DISQUALIFIERS

## PART IV- LUXATING PATELLAS

*This article is the fourth in our series of identifying and explaining congenital disqualifiers. A congenital disqualifier is a serious defect and will impair the quality of life and use of an animal. Many of these defects are suspected of being genetically transmitted and animals exhibiting these faults at birth are disqualified from being registered.*

Luxating is a veterinarian description for dislocating. Patella is your llama or alpaca's "knee", the joint on the front of her hind leg or if you want the front of the convergence of the femur and tibia of the back legs. So a luxating patella is a dislocating knee, a knee that keeps slipping out of its socket or one that can be dislodged from its normal position.

There are generally four recognised degrees (grades) of luxation:

1. The knee only slips out when the vet manipulates it.
2. The knee luxates occasionally when the camelid is walking or running but usually slides back by itself as the animal continues moving.
3. The knee luxates frequently and causes chronic lameness. Even when you put it back manually, it doesn't seem to last long.
4. The knee luxates, stays that way, and you can't put it back into its socket. This grade is very rare.

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The defect is most easily identified by palpating the patella. A patella that is easily rotated from its correct position indicates the leg is unsound. Both medial (sideways) and lateral (up and down) patella luxations have been identified in camelid crias. Luxation may occur in one knee, or in both. Lameness caused by pain or mechanical impairment is present. Congenital bilateral (both knees) patellar luxation causes the cria to assume a crouched position (Fowler 1998) making walking difficult. Heat and swelling may also be present. Suspect congenital luxating patella if your llama or alpaca cria sometimes lifts one hind leg while it is running or moving quickly, or if it often moves both rear legs at the same time. Sometimes the knee slips only for a few moments, then slides back into place.

Sometimes the knee slips out and stays out, and your llama or alpaca cria will hold its leg off the ground and limp, perhaps tucking her thigh into her body.

Occasionally a luxating patella can become "locked. When this happens the back leg will be fixed in extension and the llama or alpaca will drag the leg if forced to move. This can be an acquired condition in older animals with a predisposition towards a congenital conformational weakness (straight rear limbs – post legged – and laxity of the tendons and ligaments.

Acquired (not congenital) medial and lateral patellar luxation usually follows a traumatic incident that ruptures the ligaments holding the kneecap in place. Such trauma may occur by failed attempts to jump a fence, slipping on an icy patch of ground or rearing and chest butting by males. However, in the absence of such proof of trauma, the weak tendons and/or shallow kneecap groove of luxating patella in a new cria is considered hereditary. While in some cases defect can be repaired by surgery remember fixing the knee doesn't fix the genes that caused the problem and the cria exhibiting congenital luxating patella is unable to be registered.