

Hi Toby! So, what does an orthopaedic vet do?

I see dogs and cats with broken legs, arthritic joints and sore necks or backs, as well as athletic animals with sprains and strains. Once we have worked out the reason why the animals are lame or painful, we devise the best way of treating each one – this might involve special medicines or operations.

Have you always wanted to be an orthopaedic vet?

I grew up on a dairy farm and actually wanted to be a cattle vet at first. Just before I went to vet school I unfortunately broke both of my own legs, and I found it really interesting when the doctors explained how they were going to fix me. At vet school I was amazed by what could be done to fix a broken leg, and I really wanted to be able to do the operations myself.

How do you mend broken bones?

Bones are wonderful in that, if they are treated properly, they will heal back to a normal bone again, so animals can often get completely back to normal – even after quite bad breaks. We sometimes put a plaster cast on younger animals' legs, just like in children. But usually we do operations to fix broken bones with pins, screws and plates that are attached to the bone under the skin.



INTERVIEW WITH AN...

ORTHOPAEDIC VET

Like a real-life superhero, orthopaedic vet Toby Gemmill puts broken pets back together after an accident. I asked him what it's like to do his job...

How long do bones take to mend themselves?

There are lots of things that affect how quickly a bone heals. We can do operations to fix bones to help them heal but, because bones are living things, we have to make sure the little blood vessels bringing nutrients and oxygen to the bone are kept intact. A fracture in a young animal can heal in 2-3 weeks, whereas a bad break in an older animal might take 3-4 months or even longer.

What's the trickiest case you've had to treat?

We sometimes have to do some very tricky operations. Recently, we saw a dog that had had a broken bone in her knee since she was a puppy. It was not possible to fix the break and make the knee better, so we used 3D printing technology to design an artificial knee. The operation to fit the new knee took nearly five hours, but the dog has recovered well and is now able to go for walks again.

What a great job! How can I become a vet?

Becoming a vet is quite hard work, but it's a very enjoyable and satisfying thing to do, so it is definitely worth all the effort. It is important to work hard at school as there is a lot to learn, and it really helps to spend as much time as possible working with animals on farms or in kennels. The most important thing is to be sure you are doing it for the right reasons – you have to like animals and their owners, and be interested in the science of making the animals better.



Toby Gemmill is a specialist in a small animal surgery at Willows Veterinary Centre in Solihull, West Midlands.

