



Brookville Road  
Animal Hospital

## Physical Therapy for Your Dog after Surgery

Everyone associated with your pet's surgery has worked to set the stage for healing and recovery. Now you can participate in that recovery during the next days and weeks. Your part will include preventing too much activity (quality rest is very important during the healing process). Do not allow your dog to jump. Overextension of the operated joint could slow healing and damage the repair. Do not allow stairs, this too will overstress the joint and slow healing. Consider putting down throw rugs with rubber backing to make it easier for your pet to feel secure while walking on floors in your house if they are a hard surface such as wood or vinyl.

Physical therapy may include application of cold or heat, assisting the pet to move the leg through a range of motion, and massage of the affected leg or legs. Physical therapy needs for your pet will change as recovery takes place. As you can imagine, at first little activity should be permitted. Later in the process, we will encourage controlled exercise. We will suggest a level of activity for your pet, but that will change as your pet's condition improves and he or she progresses toward recovery.

Goals for physical therapy include: speeding the recovery of the affected limb, by helping to restore a normal range of motion for the affected joint(s), prevent loss of muscle mass, rebuild the muscle mass as rapidly as possible after recovery and returning the limb to normal function. These goals will be reached with your care at home. We set the stage for recovery with surgery; the rest is up to you and your pet.

### **FORMS OF PHYSICAL THERAPY:**

**Massage:** First, massage the affected leg with gentle manipulation of the muscles for 5-10 minutes. This will minimize adhesions, stimulate endorphin release, decrease edema, and help relieve stress and anxiety. Start by gently petting your dog along its back to help relax them. Once they are relaxed, you can begin massaging the affected leg. Feel free to massage the other legs and other areas, as well, since other parts of your dog's body have been compensated due to disuse of the surgery leg.

**Moist Heat Therapy:** After the first week following the muscle massage, you can next use moist heat. Moist heat penetrates the tissues deeper than dry heat. You may use a commercial heating pack such as those filled with corn or rice, etc. You may also use a cloth that has been placed in comfortably warm water then wrung out. Just remember, if it is too hot for your skin, then it is too hot for your dog's skin. Apply the moist heat to the affected stifle for 10 minutes prior to the physical therapy session.

**Range of Motion:** After massaging the leg for a few minutes, do a range of motion exercise for each major joint in that limb. If the leg stays in one position too long, the limb will become stiff, which can lead to a slower return to normal activity.

- ♥ Support the leg both above and below the knee.
- ♥ Gently flex (bend) the joint until the pet shows discomfort. Hold that position for a count of ten, and then gently extend the leg into a straight position, but once again, just until the point of discomfort.
- ♥ Hold the leg in an extended position (straight) for a few seconds, then repeat this whole process 10 or 15 times if your pet will allow it.
- ♥ You can also try holding the foot and move the affected leg in a bicycling motion.

**Short and Slow Controlled Leash Walks:** At first you should just walk your pet outside to eliminate and then bring them back inside. As the weeks progress, your length of walks will lengthen and will help strengthen the leg. The slower your dog walks, the more likely it is for them to try and use his/her leg while walking. Make sure your leash is not a retractable one. **Your dog should be kept on a short lead** (very close to your body). You might want to praise your dog when it uses its limb while walking. This may encourage him/her to use it normally.

**Cold Therapy:** Apply an icepack to the surgery site after the exercise period for 4 or 5 minutes. This helps decrease inflammation, pain, and swelling. Cold therapy is very important the first 72 hours after surgery. (Do not apply heat to the injury for the first 4 days post-op.)

### **Immediate Post Operative Period**

1. During the first 3 to 5 days, we want to keep pain under control and limit any swelling associated with the original injury and surgery.
2. Give the prescribed medication on a regular basis.
3. Make sure that your pet has strict confinement during recovery.
4. Perform gentle physical therapy 2 to 4 times daily followed by ice pack.

### **Week 1:**

1. Massage (5-10 minutes, 3-4 times/day)
2. Range of motion exercises (10 repetitions, 3-4 times/day if possible)
3. Short and slow controlled leash walks (5 minutes, 3-4 times/day)
4. Cold therapy (5 to 10 minutes after exercise)

### **Week 2:**

1. Massage of the affected limb.
2. Moist heat (for 10 minutes prior to exercise)

3. Range of motion exercises (15 reps, 3-4 times/day)
4. Short and slow controlled leash walks (5-10 minutes, 3-4 times a day)
5. Cold therapy (as needed)

**Week 3:**

1. Massage (10 minutes, 2-3 times/day)
2. Moist heat (10 minutes prior to exercise)
3. Range of motion exercises as needed (if your dog is using his leg on his walks, you can discontinue ROM exercises)
4. Slow controlled leash walks (15-20 minutes, 3-4 times/day)
5. Discontinue post-therapy icing

**Week 4:**

1. Massage, as needed
2. Moist heat, as needed (1-2 times per day if your dog enjoys the heat)
3. Range of motion exercises, if needed
4. Controlled leash walks (increase to 20 minutes, 3-4 times/day)

**After the First Three Weeks**

At the three week examination, specific instructions will be given for your pet. In general your pet will be able to start rebuilding the strength in the leg at that time. Each pet will progress at a different pace. Contact this office if there are questions about how rapidly your pet is progressing and what exercise is reasonable.

Exercises for 3-12 weeks post-op:

1. As the leg is stable, slow walks on good footing should be added.
2. Perform sit-to-stand exercises (anytime after week 3).
3. Have your pet walk in a figure 8 pattern (starting week 4).
4. Walk up and down inclines (starting week 5).
5. Slow ball play: fetching at a short distance.
6. Climbing stairs with your supervision (weeks 9-12).
7. Swimming is great exercise if that is possible (weeks 9-12). Small pets can be placed in sinks or tubs. Larger pets require pools or ponds.
8. Up to 10 weeks after surgery, your pet should have strict supervision when they are off-leash. If they tend to jump or chase things, then they should not be allowed to be off-leash until after 10 weeks.

**Additional Therapy Methods:****Cold Laser Therapy**

Class 4 lasers (also called Cold Lasers) are a therapy that is increasing used to decrease pain and inflammation in people and pets. We have this therapy available at

Brookville Road Animal Hospital. We use it immediately following surgery and we can offer a series of therapy sessions to help your pet have a more comfortable recovery.

#### Under Water Treadmill

While we do not offer this therapy, it is a worthwhile method of strengthening muscles and regaining mobility in some conditions. It is available in various locations in the greater Indianapolis area. We recommend this therapy in some cases with long standing mobility issues.