

Physical Therapy Descriptions for Home Care: Post-Op

PLEASE REFER TO YOUR HOME PLAN FOR SPECIFIC TIME PERIODS FOR PERFORMING THESE EXERCISES and PHYSICAL THERAPY REGIMINES!

You may also reference "Youtube" for video depictions of physical therapy exercises for dogs. Put in search criteria: Passive Range of Motion Exercises Dog. Washing State University has a good video. You only need to focus on the leg that had surgery.

Passive Range of Motion Exercises: Perform 2-4 times daily.

Have your pet lay on his/her side. Start with the furthest joint away from the body and isolate it by holding the bone above the joint and below. Flex and extend this joint 5 times slowly. Then move up to the next joint and repeat. In the hind leg this will occur in this order:

- 1) Flex and extend the hock/ankle 5 times
- 2) Flex and extend the stifle/knee 5 times
- 3) Flex and extend the hip 5 times

Repeat this three times, for a total of 15 reps, in 3 sets of 5.

- 4) Perform the range of motion in a manner similar to riding a bicycle. Hold the leg parallel to the body and hold near the foot, move the leg so that it mimics riding a bicycle. Do this for 15 reps.

Heat Therapy

Heat therapy can help decrease your pet's pain and muscle spasms, increase nerve conduction, improve the elasticity of fibrous tissue, and increase blood vessel dilation. Heat therapy can also be used whenever your pet seems uncomfortable.

Apply immediately before a physical therapy session. Apply warmth to the site of your pet's stiff joint, injury, or surgery site for 10 to 15 minutes using hot packs wrapped in a cloth or towel, heat wraps, warm water, or towels soaked in hot water (but not too hot).

Be very careful to avoid burns – check the area often to make sure the skin isn't too hot; if your pet protests, it may be too hot!

To make your own hot pack: soak a towel in hot water, or wet it and warm it in the microwave. Put the towel in a plastic bag, cover the injury site on your pet's body with another towel or cloth, and place the plastic bag over it, again insuring the pack isn't hot enough to burn your pet's skin. Test the temperature on your own forearm to make sure.

Cold Therapy

Cold therapy (cryotherapy) can help to reduce inflammation and swelling, muscle spasms, and also pain.

Apply cold packs to your pet's injury or surgery site for 10 to 15 minutes, and especially after each physical therapy session. You can use commercial ice packs, frozen bags of veggies from your freezer, or create your own ice pack by combining one part rubbing alcohol and three parts water in a plastic bag and freezing it.

Always place a cloth or towel between the ice pack and your pet's skin, and check the area every few minutes. NEVER apply directly to a fresh surgical site.

Walking

Walking can help increase your pet's range of motion, promote normal gait and movement, improve strength and muscle mass, and promote good circulation.

- Immediately after your pet undergoes surgery or suffers an injury that limits her mobility, it's important to follow your home plans directions on duration of walking.

Once it's safe for your pet to walk with you, put a leash on her and walk her short distances on firm surfaces that provide good footing. **Go slow so your pet has time to place each paw on the ground and shift weight to that limb. This will insure even therapy across all limbs.**

As your pet improves, usually by week 4 to week 6, you may walk her up a gradual incline or short flight of stairs to increase strength, muscle mass, flexibility, and range of motion in her back legs. **Also walk her in figure-8 patterns and small circles to encourage her to put weight on all four legs evenly.**

Perform sit-to-stand movements to strengthen her leg muscles. You can do this periodically on walks, or have her do sets of stationary sit-to-stands. Initially do this 3-5 times twice daily.

Massage

Massage along the surgical area with gentle circular pressure before and after range of motion exercises to help with fatigue and pain in the limb.

Good luck and please call if you have any questions or concerns!

