

## Home Care Tips for Surgery Patients

*To help you and your pet move through the initial recovery period as smoothly as possible, please consider these suggestions to prepare for your pet's return home following surgery.*

- Following surgery, your pet's activity will need to be restricted for a period of time. This means trips outside are always on a short leash (not a flexible lead) for urination and defecation purposes only unless otherwise instructed. Trotting, running, jumping, playing, and rough-housing (all the fun stuff...) are to be avoided until your surgeon says otherwise. Do not let your pet make his own decisions on this. *He may feel well enough, but doesn't understand he isn't fully healed and can risk re-injury!*
- Not all dogs are used to walking on a leash, and many don't walk quietly next to their owner. While this isn't a problem for a healthy pet, it's a major safety hazard following surgery! We strongly suggest you and your dog practice calmly walking on a short leash well before surgery if possible (dust off that gentle leader or sensation harness if necessary). This will make the recovery process easier on you and much safer for your pet!
- Prepare an area where your pet can be confined to restrict activity, but still allow him/her to get up and move around. Unless your surgeon specifies "crate/cage rest", this area can be a small room or section of a room. This area should provide secure footing for your pet's safety and confidence, such as carpeting or rubber-backed mats that don't slide. Yoga mats provide secure footing and many are machine washable.
- If your pet is crated, make sure there is secure footing in the crate as well as the entrance to prevent slipping. Rubber-backed or non-skid bathtub mats work well.
- Provide warm, comfortable bedding for your pet. If at first your pet is unable to get up and move around independently, select a well-padded bed to cushion joints and reduce pressure, which can cause bed sores.
- Use rubber-backed mats for secure footing next to bedding, as well as where your pet stands to eat and drink.
- Some back injuries affect a pet's ability to control urination and this may continue temporarily even after surgery. Make sure to have absorbent piddle pads on hand to protect bedding, and baby wipes for cleanups to reduce the chance of urine burns on the skin.
- Use rubber-backed mats and runners to provide safe corridors of secure footing across wood, tile, or vinyl floors. This will increase your pet's safety and encourage use of all limbs. Secure footing is especially important for senior dogs who are already prone to trips and stumbles, and may be losing confidence in their ability to maneuver around the house.

- Stairs or other potentially unsafe areas of the home should be closed off with secure baby or pet gates. Stair use is generally allowed as long as your pet is supervised - ask your surgeon for specific recommendations.
- If your pet needs assistance to walk or negotiate stairs, or to reduce weight-bearing on a limb after surgery, use a bath towel, sheet, or canvas log carrier as a makeshift sling under the chest or abdomen as appropriate. After many orthopedic procedures, we will send your pet home with a sling, and they are available for purchase if desired.
- Some pets are unable to move around independently after certain injuries or surgeries. They can become frustrated and try to get to you or be too active, or lose motivation and experience depression because they can't participate in family activities. In these cases, it is important to include your pet in family time as much as possible, as long as it is safe. This may mean carrying or helping your pet to a room to spend time with you or the family, or even relaxing a few house rules to allow companionship to boost your pet's spirits during the recovery process.
- Your surgeon may recommend home treatments of cold or heat. Cold treatment is useful to reduce pain and swelling. Commercial cold packs are available (those that stay soft and malleable are best). Bags of frozen peas or corn work nicely as makeshift cold packs as well. The proper way to use a cold pack is to place a thin, damp cloth (such as a pillowcase) between the pack and the skin. Commercial hot packs are available that can be heated in the microwave, or you can heat uncooked rice in a breathable pouch such as a pillowcase or sock. Use toweling next to the skin to protect it from getting too hot, while still allowing heat to pass through. *Always check the temperature by placing the hot pack on your own arm first*, and never use an electric heating pad on your pet.

### Remember

A pet's surgery and recovery not only affect the pet, but every member of the family. If you have children or other pets in the home, you will also need to think about them with regards to your injured pet's safety and vulnerability during recovery.

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