

Greater Cincinnati Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Services

Susan Hodge, DVM, DACVS-SA

Physical Therapy for LFS (Knee surgery): 2-8 weeks post-operative

1. Warm Compresses (warm up) -

We recommend applying a warm pack to the areas to be worked on for 10 minutes before beginning your rehabilitation session. We do not recommend applying the heat for longer than 15 minutes as it will not have a beneficial effect. **Never apply heat to an area that is inflamed, warm to the touch, or has an open sore**

Home-made warm packs can be made by:

- filling a sock with uncooked (dry) rice
- Tie the sock off at the open end (knotting end, rubber band, or other)
- Heat the sock and rice in the microwave for about 1 minute. Shaking the sock after heating will ensure that the heat is evenly distributed and there are no hot spots. We always recommend that you check the temperature of the sock on yourself before applying to your pet's skin or fur. If the sock is too hot for you, it will be too hot for your pet. Make sure to check the skin at the area you are warming at least one time during treatment to be sure it is not too hot.

* If you use another type of hot pack, be sure to place a towel between the skin and the hot pack. We do not recommend using a heating pad or hot water bottles on animals due to the non-uniform heat in these devices and their ability to cause a burn. If your pet reacts negatively to the application of heat, we recommend removing the heat source immediately as your pet's skin may be sensitive and we do not want to burn the skin. You may need to apply a towel directly to the skin if the area has been shaved to prevent reactions from your pet.

2. Massage for edema

The goal of this massage is to gently stimulate the body to reabsorb any fluid. There does not have to be firm or hard pressure and your pet should not object to this touching. If your pet acts painful, you are pushing too hard. The lymphatic system only needs light touch, even as little as tickling the skin to stimulate fluid reabsorption. We recommend you start at the most distal portion of the swelling (toward the paw) and work toward the body in order to stimulate the body to absorb the fluid and move it toward the heart.

3. Passive Range of Motion

Each joint can be moved through a comfortable range of motion for 10 repetitions, 2 times per day. After doing range of motion, hold every 5th repetition at a stretch for 15 seconds in one direction, then the other. We recommend that you support the bones on either side of the joint you are manipulating. Try to make a smooth, slow motion with the limb and support the upper portion of the limb. This exercise can be demonstrated at your appointment. If you are unsure what is normal for this joint or limb on your pet, we recommend practicing on the other limb until you are comfortable.

4. Bicycle Exercises

The motion during this exercise can be considered to be similar to the motion of the limb if your pet was riding a bicycle with the paw on a pedal. In fact, you can allow your hand to act as the pedal and move the limb in a circular type motion. This exercise can be performed with your pet standing or laying down (whichever is more comfortable for you and your pet). We recommend that the limb be gently moved in a smooth, flowing motion. For recovering neurologic patients, it is felt that there is benefit to having the paw actually touch the floor or your hand as if it touches the ground at the bottom of the motion. Repeat for the other limb if needed. All joints should be put through gentle flexion and extension with this movement. **Perform this exercise for 5-10 repetitions, 2-3 times a day.** If your pet had problems with the hind limbs only, this exercise is only needed on the back legs, but if your pet had neck surgery you should perform this exercise on all four limbs.

5. Sit-to-Stand Exercises -

The goal is to have your pet sit correctly during this activity, which means that they should sit squarely with both legs evenly bent. If your pet cannot sit correctly at this time, you may need to do more range of motion exercises before trying this activity, however your pet does not have to be perfect in order to try this exercise. If you have problems, you may need to have your pet sit next to a wall with the affected side toward the wall to encourage appropriate motion of the leg. The eventual goal is that your pet uses both legs equally to stand up. **Do this exercise for 5-10 repetitions, 1-2 times a day. As your pet improves, you can increase to 15 repetitions 3-4 times a day. You can use treats for this activity, however please do not overfeed your pet.**

6. Slow walking (work up to 20 minutes) -

Be sure to walk slowly and to use the sling if there is any chance of falling. The goal is to make your pet better with each step and to make them use each leg with every step. Start with multiple short trips and work up from there. If your pet is consistently using the le(s) to walk, you can start to increase the pace (speed) of the walk as your pet improves. If your pet lifts up the leg or skips a few steps with the leg, you should slow the pace down until they are using the leg with each step.

7. Cryotherapy/Cold packs (optional) -

This treatment can be beneficial after exercise in order to prevent swelling and pain related to activity. **Place an ice pack over the affected area for 10-15 minutes.** This treatment can be done 2-3 times per day. Be sure to check the area under the ice pack several times during icing to be sure the area is not getting too cold. Again, if it is too cold for your skin, then it is likely too cold for your pet. You can reduce the degree of coolness directly on the skin by applying a single layer of towel between the ice pack and the skin to improve comfort and prevent sticking of the baggie. ** Cold packs can be made by using a bag of frozen vegetables, or by placing ice cubes or crushed ice in a baggie.