

Greater Cincinnati Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Services

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Physical Therapy for Back Surgery: 6+ weeks post-operative

1. Passive Range of Motion

Each joint can be moved through a comfortable range of motion for **10 repetitions, 2 times per day**. 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.

2. 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.

3. Standing or Balancing -

The goal is to encourage your pet to put weight on the healing or affected legs. Initially, you will be holding your pet up, but as they get stronger on the hind legs they will be able to bear more weight on their own and you will just have to help them balance on the legs. Your pet will initially want to shift weight forward to not put weight on the hind legs, but you should help them shift the weight backwards to encourage equal weight bearing on all four limbs. It will take several sessions to get your pet to understand what is desired, so do not get frustrated. Initially start with short times standing, such as for **5 - 30 seconds**, then **work up to a length of time of 2 minutes**. Repeat this 2-3 times each session as your pet improves.

4. Single Leg Balancing (Three Leg Standing) -

The goal is to encourage your pet to put the healing or affected leg(s) down and gain confidence in each side by lifting up one leg at a time in order to force weight bearing on the recovering limb(s). Your pet will initially want to shift weight forward to not put weight on the healing legs, but you should shift the weight backwards to encourage weight bearing. It will take several sessions to get your pet to understand what is desired. Initially, there will be gentle, light weight bearing, but the amount of weight should increase on the leg as your pet gets stronger. Initially, start with short times standing, such as for **5 - 30 seconds**, then **work up to a length of time of 2 minutes**. Repeat this 2-3 times each session as your pet improves.

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. **Start with 5 repetitions and work up to 15 -20 repetitions 3-4 times a day. You can use treats for this activity, however please do not overfeed your pet.**

6. Walking -

Be sure to walk slow enough that your pet is using all four limbs. The leash length can be increased at this time to a longer leash to allow more freedom. 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: at this time you may be at **10 minutes two to three (2-3) times a day** and you can continue to increase each session by 1-3 minutes every few days as long as your pet is doing well. If your pet is consistently using the leg to walk, you can start to increase the pace (speed) of the walk as your pet improves. If you 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. Stair Climbing –

* Some pets will not ever be strong or steady enough to do flights of stairs on their own whereas others will improve enough to be able to perform this activity. In most cases, we recommend stairs only under supervision and you can begin to strengthen your pet on steps with the following activities.

Encourage your pet to use each foot, especially the affected leg, correctly during this activity as they walk up the steps. The goal is that your pet does not skip, hop, or hold up the affected leg(s) during this activity. If they will not leave the paw on the floor, then go back to the balancing exercises and try this activity again in a couple of weeks. Start with a short flight of stairs that are 4-6 in number (half of a flight), then you can work up to a full flight of stairs as your pet improves. **Do this exercise for 2-4 repetitions, 1-3 times a day.** Always have your pet on a leash so that you have some control of the speed of stair climbing or your pet will just lift up the leg and run up the stairs.