

Spinal Cord Surgery Aftercare Information

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Patient Name: _____

Date: _____

Surgery Performed: () Hemilaminectomy at _____.
() Dorsal laminectomy at _____.
() Ventral slot at _____.

Prognosis:

- () About 80% of the dogs having decompressive spinal surgery will regain the ability to walk well again if they had deep pain present prior to surgery.
- () Your pet did not have deep pain at the time of surgery and the prognosis is less certain.

Convalescent period: By 10-14 days after surgery, many patients will regain some voluntary motion in the hind limbs (able to move their legs). As motion in the hind limbs returns, your pet should develop the ability to urinate and defecate on their own again. Over a period of 3 to 6 weeks, your pet should regain the ability to walk as they gain strength. Some dogs do not show any improvement for 1 to 2 months after the injury or surgery, however, this is less common. Physical therapy will improve the speed and degree of recovery.

Rest: Your pet should be kept in a crate, playpen, or confined to a small space at all times unless under direct supervision for the first 4-6 weeks. Some walking is allowed when your pet is stronger, but do not allow your pet to drag their hind end around as it may damage the skin and cause wounds on the skin.

Incision: Please check the incision for signs of problems including: redness, swelling, pain, discharge, opening, or loss of sutures/staples. Do not allow your pet to lick at the incision. This is not a frequent problem following neck or back surgery, but a t-shirt or E-collar should be used to prevent licking or chewing.

Bladder care: It is very common for patients with spinal cord injuries to lose control of the bladder and their bowel movements (defecation). We recommend that you should still take your pet outside as would be normal for your pet (3 to 5 times daily) for elimination purposes so that your pet will be encouraged to do bodily functions outside. If your pet is not able to urinate on their own, the bladder may need to be expressed. We recommend that you do this either outdoors, over a disposable pee pad, or over the tub. Bladder expression can be done by applying constant pressure to the belly in front of the hind limbs (usually about halfway between the ribs and pelvis from front to back and about halfway up the body wall when looked at from the side). Your pet will most likely have a bowel movement within the first 3-5 days of returning home. Your pet should urinate at least once daily.

- When your pet is discharged you should be told whether:

- () Your pet has been urinating on their own and will not likely need the bladder expressed.
- () Your pet may need some assistance urinating, but has made attempts to urinate alone.
- () Your pet needs medication to help with full bladder function

Physical Rehabilitation: Physical therapy is recommended for optimal results.

() A recheck will be recommended in a certain number of days.

() Please call or ask if you are interested in more aggressive physical therapy sessions.

Laser therapy and underwater treadmill therapy may be recommended.

Passive physiotherapy: These exercises will keep the limbs from getting permanently stiff. Each exercise should be done 3-4 times daily for 10 minutes each time.

- Range of motion: Flex, and extend all of the joints of the hind limb including the ankle (hock), knee (stifle) and hip.
- Another important exercise is called abduction of the hip. This involves moving the leg away and toward the belly (almost like your pet is lifting the leg up to urinate).

Active physiotherapy: Complete this exercise 3-4 times daily for 5 minutes each time.

- Standing exercises: Elevate your pet's back end and place the hind limbs in a standing position with both paws on the floor (be sure the paws are positioned correctly with the bottoms or pads of the feet on the floor). Initially you will have to support your pet's back end, but with time your pet will be able to hold some weight and will be able to balance on their own. You will want to continue these exercises until your pet is standing on their own. Early on after surgery your pet will be weak, but with time they should be able to support weight for a longer period of time.
- Another form of physiotherapy is swimming. This can be done at home in the bathtub, but is best done at an available facility. This can be started about 7-10 days after surgery (at this time the incision will be sealed), and it is best is to use warm water for this activity. We would recommend swimming with support under the belly no more than 4 times daily for 10 minutes per time.

Medications:

() **Fentanyl patch** (sizes available include 12, 25, 50, 75, & 100 ug patches): This is a clear plastic patch applied to your pet's skin for relief of discomfort or pain control. You will be instructed on when to remove the patch from your pet's skin (usually the date it should be removed will be noted). In most pets, the effects of this patch will work for about 3-5 days total (average of 4 days). It can be disposed of in two ways only, either place the patch in a plastic bag and return it to the office that dispensed it to you for disposal, or fold it in half, and flush it down the toilet. Do not allow pets or people to lick, eat or chew the patch because this may result in intoxication. The effects of the patch take 12-24 hours to either start to work or for the effects of the patch to wear off. Other medications can be used with the patch in place if needed and instructions on adjusting doses should be provided for you.

() **Anti-inflammatory medications:** Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID's) include Rimadyl (Novox, Carprofen), Deramaxx, Metacam, Previcox, and others are available in either Brand name or generic forms: (tablet sizes or liquid concentrations vary depending on the product): The dose will be given in terms of the number of tablet(s), partial tablet, or volume of liquid (in mL) needed to be administered by mouth and the frequency will be noted for you (either every 12 or 24 hours) for 10-14 days as needed for pain control. These medications reduce inflammation, pain, and swelling. Do not give any other medications (particularly NOT Aspirin or steroids) with this medicine unless instructed by a veterinarian. Stop administering this medication if you notice any vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, or black tarry stool. The time of the next dose that this medication is due will be noted on your discharge instructions (am/pm). Some doctors prefer that this medication is not started until your pet leaves the hospital and is eating more normally.

() **Steroids** – Prednisone, Prednisolone, Dexamethasone, DepoMedrol, or other types are available: You will be instructed on the number of tablet(s) or partial tablet to be given and the frequency. This medication is usually administered on a gradually decreasing dose which is tapered over several days to prevent side effects from suddenly stopping this

medication. Steroids are used for reducing swelling in the spinal cord. Common side effects include an increase in drinking, increase in urinations, and an increase in appetite. Please continue to feed what is considered a normal amount of food to prevent weight gain during recovery. The time of the next dose that this medication is due will be noted on your discharge instructions (am/pm).

- () Pain relieving medications: **Tramadol** 50 mg: The dose will be given in terms of the number of tablet(s) or partial tablet needed to be administered by mouth and the frequency will be noted for you (either every 8, or 12 hours) for 10-14 days as needed for pain control. This medication is an opioid and may cause sedation, mild constipation, or a decreased appetite. These side effects are related to the dose of the medication. Please call your doctor if you have concerns about any side effects. The time of the next dose that this medication is due will be noted on your discharge instructions (am/pm).
- () **Muscle relaxant:** Methocarbamol or Valium (Diazepam) may be administered: The dose will be given in terms of the number of tablet(s) or partial tablet needed to be administered by mouth and the frequency will be noted for you (either every 8, or 12 hours) for 10-14 days as needed. This is a muscle relaxant which is used to help reduce muscle spasms following surgery. Side effects of this medication include sleepiness and sedation, please call if you have concerns. The time of the next dose that this medication is due will be noted on your discharge instructions (am/pm).
- () **Other: Antibiotics** may be administered if needed, depending on the case. The dose will be given in terms of the number of tablet(s)/capsule(s) needed to be administered by mouth and the frequency will be noted for you (either every 12 or 24 hours) for the appropriate number of days. Antibiotics would be used to prevent infection or treat contamination noted at the time of surgery. Any antibiotic may cause nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Most side effects can be minimized by administering the medication with food. The time of the next dose that this medication is due will be noted on your discharge instructions (am/pm).
- () Other: Other medications may be added as deemed necessary.

Nausea is common following General Anesthesia, in case of nausea:

- **FOOD AND WATER:** Large intakes of food and water following a hospital visit are common due to the excitement of returning home. This type of vomiting can often be eliminated by not allowing access to food or water for 2 hours after returning home.
 - o A bland/special diet may recommended, the length of time will depend on the type of surgery that has been performed. For orthopedic or neurologic surgery the bland diet may only be needed for a few days, following intestinal surgery, the special diet may be needed for up to a couple of weeks.
 - o Following any nausea or intestinal surgery, food and water is recommended in small amounts every 4-6 hours for a few days, then the volume can be increased and the frequency of meal feedings can be decreased to what is more normal.

A bland diet such as Eukanuba Low Residue, Hill's I/D, or Royal Canine Intestinal diets can be purchase or a home-made diet can be made with a 50:50 mixture of a cooked protein source such as hamburger, turkey, chicken, or cottage cheese (all fat removed) combined with a carbohydrate source such as rice, pasta, or mashed potato. We recommend gradually mixing the regular diet into this bland diet during the first week home.

PLEASE RETURN your pet for () A recheck will be recommended for suture/staple removal
or incision check in 10-14 days.
() A re-examination will likely be recommended in 4-6 weeks.