

Greater Cincinnati Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Services

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Physical Therapy for Back Surgery: 2-6 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. 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.

3. 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.

4. Standing or Balancing with a push-

The goal is to encourage your pet to put weight on the healing or affected leg(s). Initially, you will be holding your pet up, but as they get stronger on the hind leg(s) they will be able to bear more weight and you will just have to help them balance on the back leg(s). Your pet will initially want to shift weight forward to not put weight on the hind leg(s), but you should help them shift the weight backwards to encourage weight bearing. It will take several sessions to get your pet to understand what is desired. You should be at about 5 minutes to start and after your pet can stand consistently for this period of time, you should start to make them take steps against a gentle push to one side. Initially you will have to help your pet correct them self, but as they get stronger they should be able to catch them self and stay up. Work for up to 10 minutes total, then allow your pet to rest. You may need to initially take rests in between sets. This should be done 2-3 times a day for best results.

5. 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.

6. Slow walking (work up to 10 minutes) – Start at 4 weeks post-operative.

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.