

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER YOUR PET'S ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY

A successful surgical outcome relies almost entirely what happens after the surgery. You play a vital role in your pet's recovery and return to normal activity. The recovery time for most orthopedic procedures is around 8 weeks.

The first 24 to 48 hours: Your pet will be very tired and will sleep more than usual. He/She should be kept in a safe, quiet and warm confined space with access to drinking water. Surgical pain will be at its highest during this time so be sure to administer pain medications as directed. Sedation may be necessary to keep your pet quiet during the recovery period. If you believe your pet (and you) would benefit from a sedative, please contact your veterinarian.

48 hours and beyond: If your pet comes home with a bandage, please review the bandage care instructions you received. The bandage needs to be kept clean and dry at all times. Also check the toes for swelling twice daily. If the bandage has slipped or if it seems to be causing your pet discomfort, please contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Monitor the incision site twice daily until the skin sutures/staples are removed. There may be some swelling and bruising that tends to drift toward the foot of the operated limb. This is normal and should resolve in 3-5 days. Apply a cool compress to the incision site for 5 to 10 minutes 2 to 3 times daily for the first 3-5 days. The incision site should have not have excessive swelling, redness or drainage and if you notice any of these or have concerns, please contact your veterinarian. **Your pet must not lick the incision site!!!** This can introduce infection and will delay the healing process. It is strongly recommended that an Elizabethan Collar (lamp shade type collar) be fitted to your pet before he/she leaves the hospital. The E collar is usually not needed once the skin sutures/staples have been removed (10-14 days).

Your pet may begin to "toe touch" on the operated limb immediately following surgery and this is absolutely fine. He/she should not be able to damage the repair walking BUT he/she should not be allowed to have any uncontrolled activity (running, jumping or falling) for the first 8 weeks following surgery. He/She should be kept in a large crate or small room with nothing to jump on or off of as directed in his/her post-operative instructions.

Physical Therapy should begin within 24-48 hours after surgery. **Be sure to have your veterinarian or technician show you how this is done at dismissal appointment.** (Click [here](#) to see a video that explains how to perform these exercises). Unfortunately, physical therapy may be a little uncomfortable initially. Ideally one person should restrain your pet while another person performs the range of motion exercises. They will usually need to be performed for 5-10 minutes 2-3 times per day for 4 weeks following surgery or as otherwise directed in the post-operative instructions.

By about the **4th week** out from surgery most pets have forgotten they have had surgery! This time will be harder for the owner than the patient. It is necessary to follow all restrictions to the 8th week of recovery to allow the complete healing to occur. **Just because your pet does not display pain does not mean the healing is completed!**

Once your pet is using the leg regularly and has had the **4-week recheck examination**. You can very gradually start controlled (short leash) walks for 10-15 minutes two to three times a day and building on that as directed by our surgeons or your veterinarian. Walking actually stimulates bone healing and is encouraged in most cases. The walks should be slow enough that your pet has to use the operated leg.

Your pet will receive an **8-week recheck examination** from your veterinarian or our surgeons. Typically at that exam, your pet will be able to gradually return to normal activity over the next 4 weeks. This gradual return to activity is needed to ensure that the soft tissues have had time to strengthen and can handle normal activity.