

Getting Your Dog Back on Its Feet

When your dog is lame from either an injury or a joint problem, the most important point to remember is to strictly follow professional recommendations for rehabilitation and recovery. In some cases, these instructions may help your pet recover fully and perhaps avoid surgery. However, if surgery is required to treat a severe injury or replace a joint, careful rehabilitation becomes even more essential. A fracture or joint replacement site that becomes reinjured or infected can leave few treatment options for your dog.

The Road to Recovery

Sprains, Strains, and Minor Surgery

For more minor injuries, such as a torn ligament, or after minimally invasive surgery, the first approach may involve giving your pet anti-inflammatory and pain medications and restricting his or her exercise and activity. Exercise restrictions usually include keeping your dog in a small space—for example, a crate—and taking him or her for only short walks on a leash. Closely following such instruc-

My Dog Is Limping— Now What?

The most effective way to treat lameness is with an accurate diagnosis of what is wrong! If your dog is limping, don't try to guess what the problem is or wait to see if it gets better on its own. A professional lameness exam, plus laboratory tests or radiographs, if necessary, can often identify the cause. Lameness can be caused by many things—infections (e.g., Lyme disease), stress fractures, soft tissue injuries, and arthritis, to name a few. Paying attention to signs that your dog is uncomfortable and acting on them quickly can help prevent smaller problems from turning into bigger ones.



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tions can sometimes keep these conditions from requiring more involved and expensive surgery and treatment. You should only give your dog medications prescribed by a veterinarian.

Traumatic Injury and Joint Surgery

More complicated injuries require a more involved recovery period. Typically, full recovery from a complex fracture repair or joint surgery, such as hip replacement, takes at least 2 to 3 months. Some dogs need 6 months of careful monitoring and rehabilitation before they are completely recovered.

Typically, when a dog is recovering from any kind of complex joint surgery, complete cage rest is prescribed (see box on next page). When bones have been broken, your dog's recovery will be further complicated by the need to keep the affected limb immobilized in a molded splint or cast for 4 to 6 weeks. While your dog is recuperating at home, you will need to give him or her any prescribed medicines. You will also need to check the cast or surgical site daily. If you notice any of the following signs, contact your veterinarian immediately:

- Swelling of the limb or surgical site
- Skin rash or pressure sores (red, blistered, or raw areas)

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Keeping Your Caged Dog—and Yourself—Sane

It's hard to know whether cage rest is harder on the dog or on the owner. Keeping your dog confined can be difficult, but no matter how "sad" or how much "better" he or she seems to be, it is vitally important to follow all the instructions you get from your veterinarian. You can make the time go faster for your pet by keeping him or her occupied with low-calorie treats and toys and by turning on a radio or television for company, especially when no one is home. Daily grooming can also be a welcome distraction for some dogs. If your dog craves company, keeping the crate

in a high-traffic area where there is plenty of activity can be another way to keep him or her entertained. If your pet is shy or nervous, you might want to keep the crate in a quiet room to reduce stress.

When taking your dog out for bathroom breaks, keep him or her on a leash at all times. Follow any instructions you get about avoiding stairs and slippery floors, and ask whether you should attach the leash to a collar or harness. Also ask about the best way to lift or support your dog when necessary.

- Unusual smell or leakage from the surgical site

You'll also want to monitor your dog's behavior, appetite, and water intake. If any of these seem unusual—for example, if your dog seems strangely tired or agitated—again, contact your veterinarian.

At the end of the cage rest period, your dog will probably need another 4 weeks of exercise restriction. After the exercise restriction period is over, you will get instructions on how to gradually increase your dog's allowed activity level.

Physical therapy, including massage and hydrotherapy, may also be helpful to your dog's recovery and may be prescribed.

Following professional recommendations for rehabilitation and recovery is the most important part of helping your dog heal.

Follow-Up

It is important to keep all your dog's follow-up appointments to make sure that healing is progressing. If implants are used to repair a fracture, a second surgery may be scheduled to remove them, especially if your pet is showing any signs of discomfort. However, if your dog seems comfortable, the decision may be made to leave implants in place.

