

# Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation

- Physical therapy and rehabilitation involve the use of therapeutic exercises to help patients recover from acute and chronic health conditions resulting from illness, trauma, or surgery.
- Physical therapy can reduce pain and improve joint range of motion.
- Physical therapy can include hydrotherapy, massage therapy, cold/heat therapy, therapeutic ultrasound, and electrical stimulation therapy.
- Be sure to follow the prescribed treatments recommended by your veterinarian.

### What Is Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation?

Physical rehabilitation for pets is the use of therapeutic exercises and range-of-motion therapy combined with additional treatments (see the list below for examples) to improve the recovery of patients with acute or chronic health conditions. Physical therapy may be recommended for patients recovering from fractures, orthopedic surgery (including cranial cruciate ligament repair, total hip replacement, or spinal surgery), and neurologic events (such as spinal injury).

### Why Might My Pet Need Physical Therapy?

Physical rehabilitation can help restore, maintain, and promote proper functioning and mobility for your pet. It can also enhance recovery after surgery, reduce pain, increase circulation, and improve coordination and range of motion. It can help keep geriatric patients more comfortable and provide a last-chance option for patients who have not had success with other treatments.

The benefits of physical therapy may include:

- Decreased pain
- Improved strength
- Improved functioning of weak limbs

- Healing of injured or inflamed tissues
- Restoration of joint range of motion
- Prevention of muscle atrophy (wasting)

Pets of all ages, sizes, and breeds can benefit from physical rehabilitation. Physical rehabilitation can help improve the quality of life for many animals suffering from chronic pain, osteoarthritis, obesity, or muscle weakness.

Physical therapy can reduce pain and improve joint range of motion.

### What Are Some Common Types of Physical Therapy?

Many types of physical therapy are used in pets. These are some of the more common ones:

- **Hydrotherapy:** Hydrotherapy is the use of water to aid in the healing and/or conditioning of a patient. Pets either swim in a pool or tank for prescribed periods of time or walk on an underwater treadmill. The water level above the treadmill is high enough to provide buoyancy but low enough so that the pet's head and shoulders are above water.

Swimming or walking underwater provides pets with the benefits of exercise—building muscle strength and improving coordination, cardiovascular health, and endurance—without the same degree of stress or pressure on joints that would be encountered while walking on the ground. Swimming and underwater treadmills allow pets to make use of the natural resistance of water and the benefit of buoyancy to experience gentle, low-impact exercise. The therapist can

## Tests and Procedures

control water depth, treadmill speed, and ramp incline to increase or reduce the level of exercise.

Hydrotherapy can help pets make the transition to land-based therapy more quickly.

- **Cold and heat therapy:** Application of cold and heat can help damaged areas heal more rapidly, reduce swelling, and provide local pain relief.
- **Therapeutic ultrasound:** Therapeutic ultrasound produces heat deep within tissues. This therapy is useful in treating joint and soft tissue injuries and chronic conditions.
- **Electrical stimulation therapy:** Small electrical currents can be used to help prevent muscle wasting in very weak patients by encouraging the muscles to contract. This therapy can also be used to help manage pain and to increase circulation and promote healing.

- **Massage therapy and supervised exercise:** Physical therapists may also use massage therapy, passive range-of-motion exercises, stretching, and physical therapy tools, such as balls, ramps, boards, poles, and wedges, to help rehabilitate your pet.
- **Home care:** Passive range-of-motion exercises, simple massage therapy, and activity goals can all be accomplished at home to support the success of therapy. Your physical therapist can develop a home treatment plan for you and your pet.

**Be sure to follow your veterinarian's recommendations regarding who should perform what types of therapy for your pet.**