

# Getting Your Dog Back on Its Feet

- The most effective way to treat lameness is to obtain an accurate diagnosis of what is wrong.
- Always strictly follow your veterinarian's recommendations for rehabilitation and recovery.
- It is critical to keep all of your pet's recommended follow-up appointments so that your veterinarian can monitor your pet's progress.

### My Dog Is Limping—Now What?

The most effective way to treat lameness is to obtain 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 veterinarian can evaluate your dog by a thorough physical examination; if necessary, laboratory tests can be performed and/or radiographs (x-rays) obtained. 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 having your dog evaluated quickly can help prevent smaller problems from becoming bigger ones.

When your dog is lame from either an injury or a joint problem, the most important point to remember is to strictly follow your veterinarian's 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 re-injured or infected can leave few treatment options for your dog.

### Sprains, Strains, and Minor Surgery

For minor injuries, such as a torn ligament, your veterinarian may first try prescribing anti-inflammatory/pain medications as well as exercise and activity restrictions for your pet. 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 instructions can sometimes keep minor injuries from requiring more involved and expensive surgery and treatment. You should only give your dog medications that are prescribed by a veterinarian.

### Traumatic Injury and Joint Replacement

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

### 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 plenty of toys and an occasional low-calorie treat; turning on a radio or television for "company" when no one is home can also help. 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; your veterinarian may recommend using a towel to support your dog as he or she walks outside to use the bathroom.

## Home Care

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*). If your dog has a broken bone, recovery is more complicated and your dog's leg will be immobilized in a molded splint or cast for 4 to 6 weeks or longer.

### If Your Dog Needs Surgery

While your dog is recuperating at home, you will need to give him or her any prescribed medicines. Do not allow your pet to scratch or chew at the sutures or bandage. An Elizabethan collar—also known as an “e” collar—may be necessary to prevent your pet from chewing the wound. 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)
- 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

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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.

### Follow Up

It is critical to keep all of your pet's recommended follow-up appointments so that your veterinarian can monitor your pet's progress. If sutures were used, your veterinarian may need to remove them. If a cast was placed, your veterinarian will want to check it periodically and eventually remove it. Radiographs or other tests may be scheduled to assess healing.

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