



If your pet has undergone surgery for an orthopedic problem, your surgeon will ask you to do several things at home to help them heal as quickly as appropriate.

Depending on the problem being treated, your pet's activity will be restricted for 6-12 weeks. By decreasing activity, excessive motion is prevented at the site of the healing bone or joint. Excessive motion can lead to wound or joint fluid production and sometimes loosening or fracture of the surgical implants (plates, screws, pins, sutures). Activity is usually limited to short leash walks (five minutes, ½ block) initially, and then gradually increased as healing progresses. Running, jumping, and playing should be avoided to prevent reinjury. The use of stairs is also discouraged. When your pet is not being directly observed, confinement in a small room or crate is recommended. Short, slow walks under your control on leash are an important part of the recovery. It is when your pet is not under direct control within the home environment that accidents can happen (for example, slipping on hardwood floors, running to the front door, jumping onto the couch, etc).



Leash and sling walking are important parts of a successful recovery.

Your pet should not be allowed to lick, chew, or scratch at the surgical site. These actions can cause delayed healing, opening of the surgical incision, and infection. Most patients will require an Elizabethan collar, or similar device, to prevent your pet from traumatizing the incision. We know that e-collars are not convenient for anyone involved—pet or caretaker. However, they are a necessary part of an uncomplicated recovery and are usually required for no longer than two weeks if your pet is not wearing a bandage.

Your surgeon may also request that you apply cold or warm compresses to the surgical site. These compresses are applied 3-4 times daily to decrease swelling and pain and are a very important part of the healing process.

Your surgeon will customize a pain management regimen for your pet. This will involve getting medications while they are hospitalized as well as medications to go home. Your pet may receive an epidural for pain management prior to surgery while under anesthesia. Medications to go home may be oral or also can involve placement of a fentanyl patch. Fentanyl is a potent morphine-like drug that your pet will absorb from the patch through their skin. Your aftercare instructions will include the type of medications to go home and how to administer them to your pet.

Your surgeon may also recommend physical rehabilitation for your pet. Many of the rehabilitation exercises may be performed at home under the direction of a physical therapist or other rehabilitation specialist. More specialized exercises—such as walking in a water treadmill—would need to be performed at a rehabilitation facility. A consultation with one of our physical therapists may be scheduled to determine if your pet should be treated with sessions at our facility or managed on an outpatient basis.



Passive range of motion exercises can help your pet recover more quickly following surgery.