

SPINAL SURGERY RECOVERY



Whether your pet has had spinal surgery due to injury or disease, it is imperative to deliver suitable post-operative care once you bring your pet home. Keeping them confined to reduce movement as much as possible, providing them with adequate food and water, checking their incision site regularly, monitoring their toileting, following their physiotherapy plan and knowing when to contact your veterinarian are essential parts of home medical care after spinal surgery.

Cage Rest

After spinal surgery, it is important to keep your pet as still as possible for at least three weeks. This requires confining them to a crate, airline carrier or playpen. The enclosure should be large enough for the pet to lie down comfortably, stand up in and turn around, but not so large that they are able to stand on their hind legs or jump up. Your pet may whine to be let out, but don't give in. A new injury to the spine will lengthen the recovery time or may even undo the surgical correction. If you have properly crate-trained your pet, this confinement should not be too stressful, as long as you take your pet out two to three times a day to eliminate waste.

After three weeks, exercise can gradually be increased. However, your pet should only exercise on the lead for another three weeks. After this period they can gradually return to their usual exercise routine.

Please, avoid jumping, running and access to sofas/ chairs or high beds for at least eight weeks.

Our most common post-operative activity recommendation is:

- + Crate/ cage confinement for three weeks
- + Room confinement for two weeks
- + House rest confinement for two weeks

Feeding

Your pet is usually kept overnight or hospitalised for longer after spinal surgery to monitor their readiness to return home. If, however, they are still recovering from the anaesthesia when you take them home, don't be surprised if they do not eat for a day or even two days. Offer them smaller, more frequent meals than usual so their digestive system has time to readjust. Your pet may be quite thirsty so provide plenty of water. If they do not resume eating or drinking in a day or two, please contact us or your local veterinarian.

Toileting

Remove your pet very gently from the crate/ cage three times a day and take them outside for toileting. You may have to support your pet by putting your arm under them or creating a sling out of a towel. Be patient and careful during this process. Do not move them with quick, jerky movements because that will aggravate your pet's healing spine. Make a note of how often and how much they urinate. If they do not urinate at least two times a day (or if you notice a swollen bladder or urine leaking while he is in the crate), contact your veterinarian because urine retention will make your animal uncomfortable and may cause damage to their bladder and kidneys.

Pain

Pain medication prescribed for your pet should be enough for their recovery. Nevertheless, if they are panting without any reason or you feel they are in pain, please contact us to discuss alternative pain treatment. The pain medication is usually used for five to seven days.

Neurological progression

Your pet's ability to move and walk should improve daily/weekly. If any deterioration in their ability to move or walk is observed contact us immediately.

Some animals will take several weeks or even months to recover. However, it is very important to inform your vet or us if you notice any deterioration in their ability to move or walk, as it could mean a relapse of the disease or a luxation or fracture of the vertebra. **THIS CAN BE AN EMERGENCY.**

Physiotherapy

The specific rehabilitation program for your pet when recovering from spine surgery depends largely on the patient's neurological status. Two phases of treatment can generally be distinguished.

1

In the immediate postoperative period (days one-three), the main goals of physical therapy are to alleviate pain in supplement to analgesic (pain) medications, reduce inflammation in the surgical region, alleviate tension and to maintain joint mobility.

2

In the days and weeks that follow, treatment still largely centres around pain control, but also focuses on preventing atrophy (muscle wastage) and improving movement patterns.

Physiotherapy at home should be provided by you, every day, several times a day, following the instructions we provide you with.

Hydrotherapy in a specialised centre is generally advised after suture removal by us. Your vet will be able to advise you on the nearest facility that offers this kind of therapy.

Please take this fact sheet with you if you visit a vet in the next three weeks. The information within may be of use to a vet who is not familiar with your pet's history.



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