

Stifle Surgery Guide for Recovery



Independence Veterinary Clinic
2328 Crown Point Executive Drive
Charlotte, North Carolina 28227
(704) 841-1313

House Preparation

Confine immediately following discharge from IVC in a dog crate, gated off area (bathroom, laundry room), confinement to small room with minimal furniture. If you have hardwood, tile, or ceramic flooring throughout your home, please take the time to cover them with rugs or nonstick bath mats. This will help your pet get good footing when walking through the home.

NO JUMPING!!

Overextension of knee could compromise repair and/or slow the healing process. It is extremely important she is not allowed to jump!!

No jumping on/off the bed.

No jumping on/off the couch.

No jumping in/out of the car.

NO STAIRS!!

Stairs will over stress the joint and inhibit repair. Until Dr. Bryan says it's okay, it's imperative that you do what you can to prevent your pet from going up and down stairs. If stairs are unavoidable or your pet is too heavy to carry up and down the stairs these precautions can be followed:

1. Restrict- Have a leash attached prior to opening the door
2. Support- use towels, bed sheet, or commercially available slings to support the rear end.
3. Limit- Block stairs your pet may have access to.

After Surgery:

Initially your pet may limp or hold the surgically repaired leg up completely. It may still be uncomfortable for them to get around on that leg. The limping should decrease over the course of the next few weeks. Your pet may begin to limp again if he or she overdoes an activity one day during recovery. Apply ice if this happens and allow a good 24 hours of rest. If the limping persists for more than 24 hours, please contact Dr. Bryan. Your pet should always be the same or slightly better every day after surgery.

What to expect

Normal:

Swelling around the incision and down the repaired leg (this should only last for the first 3-4 days following surgery)

Swelling of the hock (ankle) about one week after surgery. This will last 2-3 days

Bruising around the incision on the surgery leg

A small amount of discharge from the incision that is clear or even a little blood tinged

Discomfort on the repaired leg and around the incision

Warm to the touch

Decreased appetite but should return to normal after a few days

No bowel movement for up to 5 days after surgery

Abnormal: (please call our office if noted)

Swelling lasting longer than 3-4 days

Bruising in areas other than the surgery site

A large amount of discharge, discharge that has a foul odor, or is milky in appearance

Bleeding that does not stop

Discomfort that is not alleviated with ice application and the pain medications we have prescribed

Discomfort that causes your pet to cry or bite

Unwilling to eat anything

Diarrhea

At all times outside of therapy **STRICT CONFINEMENT is MANDATORY**. It is extremely important to follow this protocol as closely as possible to ensure proper recovery.

It is important to perform all therapies in the order described. **GO SLOW**. If your pet is painful lessen or stop the activity. If the pain persists contact Dr. Bryan.

Confine to a crate (or other approved small area) whenever you leave your pet alone. Also confine if your dog is hyper excitable. If you are unable to restrict your pets activities medications may help. Please contact us if you need assistance.

Day 1- 2weeks:

Short Controlled Leash walks: for toileting only.



Short, **SLOW** walks are no doubt one of the **MOST IMPORTANT EXERCISES** to be performed during the recovery period. By walking **SLOWLY** you will be encouraging your dog to use the affected limb in a very careful manner. Short controlled leash walks means that your dog must be kept on short lead (dog kept very close to your body), so that you have complete control over your dog. It does **NOT** mean clipping on a retractable leash and heading out for a leisurely walk. Walking for short distances is beneficial to keep the muscles strong and the joints lubricated. However, too much activity during the initial phase of recovery can be detrimental and should be avoided.

Initially, the walks will be for elimination only. As time progresses, so will the duration of the walks. If you feel that your pet may need extra support, especially on any slick surfaces, please use a sling for support.



Icing:

2-3 times a day for 15 minutes per session for the first three days. Use a towel to support the leg in a level position and reward your dog with belly rubs. Also place a towel between your pet and the ice pack. Use a bag of frozen peas, a flexible ice pack purchased from a drug store, or a freezer bag filled with 50% rubbing alcohol and 50% water.



Massage: Gentle massage of the entire limb, including around the surgical site (not directly over the incision), helps improve circulation, reduce edema, and relaxes the muscles. Work from the toes upward and use gentle but firm strokes. Remember massage should never be painful.

Moist heat: beginning on the 3rd day home, you may use a heat pack first thing in the morning for ten minutes *as long as there is no swelling* DO NOT USE HEAT if there is swelling. Be careful not to burn skin. Test on your arm. Wrap a hot moist towel around the limb or use an electric heating pad. There are commercially available heating packs such as those filled with corn, rice etc.



Passive Range of Motion (PROM) is using your hands to move the joints through their available range of motions without muscle contractions. The leg should NOT be painful when performing PROM. Place your pet in a comfortable position on their side. It may take two people- one to pet them and the other to perform the exercises. Try to keep your pet as relaxed as possible. Be sure you are in a comfortable position. To help control movement of the leg, you will support the limb with both hands. Be careful not to grasp the leg- use open, flat hands as much as possible. Keep the leg level with the body in its natural position. You may need to roll up towels to help support the leg. You will gently and slowly move the leg through a pain-free range of motion. Do not force the joint further than it can comfortably go.

Stifle (knee) - flex/bend the knee (aim the "heel" to the rear end) and hold it for 5-10 seconds and then slowly and gently extend/straighten it and hold for 5-10 seconds.

Tarsus (ankle) - flex this joint by pushing up on the paw. Allow the knee to flex as well.



Hip- extension (no rotations). Slowly extend the hip backwards, keep the knee comfortably straight and only go as far as tolerated by your dog.



**If your pet is uncomfortable in either flexion or extension, shorten the time.

Do 3 sets of 10 repetitions at each joint,
2-3 times a day within the dog's pain tolerance.

***Schedule suture removal and complimentary recheck**

Weeks 2-4:

Massage to warm up muscles prior to exercises

PROM twice daily

Leash walks: 5 minutes for the first five days, then increase by 3-5 minutes per week building up to 10 minutes by week 4. Walk on flat land only, with good footing, no hills or difficult terrain (deep snow, mud, sand). Monitor for signs of fatigue, quality of movement, and/or pain. If pain or discomfort is seen, decrease the amount of time being walked. If lameness persists for more than 24 hours, please call.

Initiate Weight Bearing: (3-5 times per day)

* Have the dog take treats from the paw of the leg that was operated on (to cause weight shifting and spinal bend)



* Lifting the unaffected hind limb off the ground



* Put a baby bootie or sock on the "good" hind paw and have the dog walk for short periods



* Loosely lift the front limb on the same side as the surgical leg and the opposite hind limb



* Lift the front legs and chest SLIGHTLY off the ground (keeping stationary). Having the front legs up on one or two steps may help this activity.



* **Figure 8's**- simply walk as if you are following an imaginary 8 drawn on the ground. Each top and bottom portion of the 8 should equal 3-5 foot in diameter. If your dog has difficulty balancing this 8, make it bigger. The purpose of the figure 8 is to increase muscle strength and encourage balance. Do 10 repetitions, 3-4 times per day.



IMG_0300.MOV

Weeks 4-6:

Continue **PROM** 1-2 times a day

Continue **weight bearing exercises**

Increase **daily leash walks** to 10-15 minutes still on flat land or **very low inclines**

Sit to Stand:

Ask the dog to sit and encourage it to tuck its surgical leg under itself normally by tapping on that foot. Or back the dog into a corner to encourage it to sit square. Give a treat when the dog makes the effort to sit straight and square.





Weeks 6-7:

PROM

Leash walks 15 minutes (watch for fatigue, limping, or hyper excitability). Can do low grade inclines. Keep the declines as low grade as possible.

Continue weight bearing exercises.

Sit-To-Stand

Weeks 7-8:

PROM

Leash walks should incorporate some forms of flat land and moderate to steep inclines and declines

Weeks 8 - 3 months:

[Schedule complimentary 8 week recheck](#)

Leash walking should be maintained until 3 months post op. When off leash activity is allowed, start with 5 minutes at the end of a leash walk and progress from here.

Stepping exercises: Set up a simple obstacle course for your dog to walk through. Space various "poles" at different distances. (Use foam noodles, brooms, mops, PVC pipes etc)



My Movie.wmv

Initiate weight bearing: (3 - 5 times per day).

Supporting the dog's torso, rock the dog backwards and forwards or from side to side to stimulate weight bearing. DO NOT push them off balance or make the dog jump for balance.



Stair work: at this stage, you can begin to incorporate stairs as a form of exercise. Start with your pet on a leash and, if needed, a towel under the belly for support. Walk slowly up about 3 stairs to start, and then slowly back down. Increase the number of stairs and the frequency of stairs each week. DO NOT give your dog free access to the stairs yet. Always keep your dog on a leash while doing this exercise.

