

Rehabilitation for the Paralyzed Pet

Post operative rehabilitation following surgery for front or rear limb paralysis is **critical** to the success of your pet's final outcome. The most common cause for paralysis in companion animals is some form of intervertebral disc herniation. Other less common causes include: trauma, tumors, malformations, FCE (fibrocartilagenous embolus, aka: spinal cord stroke), cysts, and extradural bleeds. In most cases surgery is helpful and your pet will have undergone spinal cord decompression via a ventral slot or hemilaminectomy procedure. Other cases will require stabilization as well as decompression. Your surgeon will explain completely the extent of your pet's disease and the surgical procedure, if any, that was performed to treat the problem. In most cases, rehabilitation of a paralyzed pet will proceed along a similar path regardless of the injury or any associated surgical procedure.

- **CONFINEMENT:** your pet should be kept in a well padded and confined area until they are fully ambulatory with minimal remaining neurological deficits. We recommend an airline travel kennel or other similar type kennel, child's play pen, large box, or even the corner of a room that has been partitioned off. Please make sure the area is very well padded with absorbent material (in case of accidents), has room for your pet to move around, and has an area for food / water.
- **ELIMINATIONS:** we typically will not send your pet home until they are urinating and defecating on their own. Initially, we would like you to carry your pet outside for bathroom duties. Please check the urine for blood, odor, or other discoloration which could indicate a bladder infection. Please check the feces for blood or dark and tarry color, which could indicate intestinal ulceration associated with the meds or original neurological problem.
- **PRECAUTIONS:** avoid slick floors, stairs, and any other setting or surface with unstable footing.
- **STAND/SUPPORT:** Lift your pet from a sitting position and place the rear feet in their normal position, support your pet with a hand between the rear legs and gradually release your support to allow increased weight bearing on your pet's rear legs and feet. You can also support your pet with a rolled towel placed under their belly. This activity should be done for 5-15 minutes 3 times daily.
- **PROM: (Passive Range of Motion)** See attached handout.
- **ENTICED WALKING:** Stand across the room and entice your pet to walk to you for a food treat, on a carpet or grass surface. Even if they are sometimes dragging their rear limbs this will encourage walking.
- **DIRECTED WALKS:** As your pet's condition improves, take them on focused leash walks for 5 to 10 minutes initially, progressing to longer walks as their strength improves.