

Physiotherapy for pets following Orthopaedic Surgery

Physiotherapy has been found to aid the recovery of pets who have undergone orthopaedic surgery.

We recommend a minimum of 4 physiotherapy sessions over an 8-week period with our specially trained veterinary nurse who will monitor your pet's recovery. She will also teach you the Physiotherapy techniques so that you may continue treatment with your pet at home



Beginning Physiotherapy

The aims of physiotherapy are to maximise physical potential by:

- Reducing pain
- Promoting the healing process
- Increasing and maintaining muscle strength and flexibility
- Improving mobility of joints
- Promoting and restoring normal movement patterns
- Increasing cardiovascular fitness

Physiotherapy should always be preceded by stroking. Not only is this quality bonding time with your pet, it also accustoms them to touch.

Stroking

This is primarily used for its calming and soothing effects and it helps to increase blood flow. It is also the easiest of the exercises can and help with a wide range of conditions.

Technique: A gliding movement performed in any direction on the surface of the body. The most effective direction is from head to tail or upwards from the feet on a limb. The hands should maintain contact with the skin at all times. The speed and depth of the stroke may vary – deep vigorous stroking may have a stimulatory effect whereas gentle superficial stroking will normally induce a sedated, relaxed state. Continue stroking for 5 minutes aiming for one stroke every 3-6 seconds. This may be carried out 3-4 times daily and is best used to begin and end physiotherapy sessions and to link other massage techniques.

Massage ('Effleurage')

Massage helps decrease swelling, promotes circulation, stretches muscles, maintains mobility of soft tissue and helps break down connections (adhesions) in scar tissue.

Massage should be carried out with relaxed hands molded to the shape of the body part being massaged. Move in the direction of venous return (e.g. upwards from foot to trunk on a limb) with an even pressure. Aim for one stroke every 5 seconds and carry out 3-4 times per day.

Specific Massage Techniques:

Kneading

Hands or fingers work in a circular motion (R hand clockwise and L hand anticlockwise).

The muscles and tissues are alternately pressed inwards and upwards, being squeezed, compressed and released in a rhythmical manner. The skin is moved over the underlying tissues. Speed and depth may be varied.

Picking-Up (squeezing)

The muscles are grasped, lifted, squeezed and released by one or both hands. The palm(s) must maintain contact with the skin.

Wringing

The tissues are grasped with both hands, lifted and then the hands alternately move in opposite directions (e.g. push forward with thumbs and pull back with fingers).

This movement should occur across the length of a muscle.

Skin Rolling

The hands lie flat on the skin surface. The skin and underlying tissues are grasped between the fingers and thumbs of both hands. The tissues are rolled backwards and forwards against the fingers and thumbs.

Passive Joint Movements

Following surgery most pets will experience a reduced range of movement (ROM). ROM is used to describe the full normal range that a joint may be moved through. Passive movements and stretches help to improve and maintain ROM. This treatment also helps to prevent adhesions and improves soft tissue extensibility which reduces the risk of further injury to other joints and structures, however it does not prevent muscle wastage.

Initially your pet should be lying on their side (lateral recumbency) with the affected limb uppermost. Support the joint being manipulated with one hand either side of the joint. Slowly move the joint to full flexion and then extension or until initial resistance is felt, or until the animal shows signs of discomfort.

Repeat this movement in a rhythmical manner 15-20 times, 3-4 times daily. Manipulate each joint in the affected limb starting with the toes and working up towards the trunk.

Try to isolate one joint at a time keeping the other joints as still as possible. Some joints will not fully flex/extend without another joint moving (e.g. stifle/hock), this is normal and it may be beneficial to move several joints at once for instance to simulate normal limb movement in a walking action.



NB.
If your pet experiences discomfort during any physiotherapy, stop immediately and contact your Avonvale surgery for advice.

Developmental Exercises

Developmental exercises will benefit your pet as it encourages the animal to bear weight on its limbs and use them in a normal action, thereby helping to improve and maintain muscle strength.

Specific developmental exercises:

Rocking

In a standing position, gently push your pet's hips from side to side, shifting their bodyweight from one leg to another and therefore changing the centre of balance.

Try not to get into a rhythm as your pet will pre-empt your movement and shift their weight in anticipation. The pet should move/wobble from the good to bad limb and vice versa. Aim for 4-5 times per session, 3-4 times per day.

Balance

Hold the pet's 'good' leg off the ground. The weaker limb will have to bear the weight. Hold for 3-5 seconds and replace. Do 3-4 times daily.



Dancing

Lift up the pet's front limbs (or encourage them to jump into position) so that they are in an upright 'walking' position. Their bodyweight is transferred onto their hind limbs. Hold for a maximum of 10 seconds and carry out 3-4 times daily.

Wheelbarrow

This is similar to dancing except the pet's hind legs are held up transferring the weight to the fore limbs. This is useful after surgery on the front legs.

Walking Exercise

Slow walking on a short lead is most beneficial as pets are most likely to use all four limbs in a normal walking pattern. If left to exercise freely, most pets will overdo it and in many cases just hold the affected limb up when walking/running.

Your vet and Vet Nurse will advise you on the duration and frequency of walking depending upon the injury and/or surgery. In most cases little and often is much better than prolonged periods of exercise. Initial limited exercise will be increased gradually as your pet's condition improves.

Walking on different surfaces (e.g. up/down hills, grass/concrete etc.) helps to improve strength and walking over obstacles such as low poles or long grass will encourage your pet to pick its feet up.

Hydrotherapy

Many pets benefit from Hydrotherapy as they are able to exercise without placing their full weight on the affected limbs. The buoyancy provided in water can increase your pet's confidence in using the limb correctly.

Please ask Avonvale staff for details of our hydrotherapy centre.



For more information
Please contact your Avonvale Vet

Avonvale

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