

Rehabilitation Following Stifle (Knee) Surgery for *Dogs*

Recovery following knee surgery takes 12-16 weeks. Your dog should be confined to the house, *short* leash, or a crate for the first 10 weeks (no off-leash activity at all during this time). He or she should not run, jump, or have unobserved exercise during this period. Please follow the steps listed below:

Week 1

- Apply an ice pack to the knee 10-15 minutes 4 times/day for the first 24 to 36 hours following surgery. (An ice slurry can be made by mixing 2 parts isopropyl alcohol to one part water in a zip lock bag and freezing. Keep the bag in the freezer when not in use.) Use a towel between the skin and ice pack for comfort.
- When swelling and redness have resolved, begin application of a warm compress (a slightly damp towel put in the microwave long enough to heat it, but still comfortable on your inner wrist) to the knee 10-15 minutes 3 times/day before performing 10 *slow, gentle* repetitions of flexing and extending the knee through range of motion. Stop each repetition when resistance is met.
- After the third day, begin slow leash walks of less than 10 minutes duration, 3 times per day. Use the short leash walks outdoors to allow your dog to urinate and defecate. *SLOWER* walking encourages your dog to use the leg earlier and speeds recovery.

Weeks 2 and 3

- Continue to apply the warm compress and perform flexion and extension of the knee as directed above. Perform physical therapy until your dog begins to put weight on the affected leg with *every step* when walking. Increase slow leash walks to 10-20 minutes, at least 2 times/day.
- At the end of Week 2, your dog must be examined by your veterinarian. At this time your veterinarian will remove sutures and evaluate use of the leg.
- After this appointment, assuming the incision has healed, swimming is encouraged. Small dogs may do this in a bathtub. Always be sure to have your dog start a swim on a slow incline (for example a sloping beach), and never allow the dog to run or jump off a pier until the rehabilitation period is complete. Sessions should start at less than 5 minutes/day and gradually increase. *Swimming may be continued for the duration of the rehabilitation period and may replace or be added to scheduled walks.*

Weeks 4 and 5

- Increase the slow leash walks to 20-30 minutes at least 2 times/day.
- Have your dog circle from the right and left in a “figure-of-eight” pattern 2-3 times/day.
- Have your dog sit and stand with the affected limb against a wall for 10-15 repetitions 2-3 times/day.

Weeks 6-12

- Increase the duration of swim sessions as your pet can safely tolerate, and /or leash walks to 30-40 minutes/day.
- Encourage the *slow* climbing of stairs 5-10 times/day to continue to build strength in the affected leg.
- Your veterinarian should reexamine your dog at week 8 to check his or her progress.

Week 12

Gradually return your dog to normal activity starting at this time. This process should be performed over a 4 week period.

*** Weight loss is often warranted in dogs with this injury and will hasten recovery. This is a very important part of rehabilitation. Please ask your veterinarian whether weight loss is needed for your dog. ***