Post Laminectomy Home Care

In dogs who have suffered motor losses, physiotherapy is extremely useful to speed their recovery to more normal function. Swimming is the best exercise because it allows the limbs to move freely in the water without having to bear weight. It also provides a bath to clean the dog and prevent skin infections. The lukewarm water also serves to increase circulation in the limbs and massage the muscles. Most chondrodystrophic (short legged) dogs will fit nicely into a bath tub filled with just enough water to allow the dog to float with its toes off the bottom. Care should be taken not to leave a dog unattended to avoid drowning. Swimming exercises may be begun 4 to 5 days post-operatively. The surgical incision may be "waterproofed" with a thin film of Vaseline. The dog should be exercised until tired and then removed and thoroughly dried. Each day the sessions will lengthen as the dog's endurance builds up. Swimming once daily is good but twice daily is even better. This will vary with the time you have available.

Additional exercises include "towel walking" paraplegic dogs where the owner holds onto a cloth sling placed under the dog's abdomen allowing the dog to "walk" alongside the owner. Allowing the hind limbs to support some weight will stimulate motor responses and strength. Exercises which manipulate the joints and massage the muscles will help prevent muscle atrophy and joint contracture. These may be done by laying the dog on its back and "bicycling" the hind limbs and forelimbs, moving the limbs through a pattern of full range of motion excursions to keep the joints limber, and pushing on the limbs to encourage muscular resistance. Massaging the muscles of the affected limbs will also help improve circulation and will feel good to your pet. Physical rehabilitation speeds recovery in patients!

Carts are made commercially or can be made at home to provide "mobility" for paralyzed dogs. Carts allow dogs to get up and participate in more household activities and when utilized with a physical rehabilitation program can be a useful tool for rehabilitation in some cases. Owners who "abandon" their dogs to carts without a physical therapist will probably never have a walking dog again. Carts have a place in the overall management of paralyzed dogs but can not be substituted for good nursing care and physiotherapy.

Occasionally a dog that has transverse malacia of its thoracolumbar spinal cord (no deep pain sensation) can learn to "walk" again using the crossed extensor reflex that may still exist in the hindlimbs. Without motor connections to the brain, this reflex is "released" and causes the involuntary motor movements that are frequently observed in the limbs. Through extensive physiotherapy, many of these dogs learn to swing their bodies to get their hindlimbs under them and allow the reflex walking movements to be effectual. This form of walking is called spinal walking and looks a bit "motorized" but serves the function well. Unfortunately many of these dogs are also permanently incontinent. Many owners’ lifestyles do not allow the time necessary to properly care for incontinent dogs. As a result many of these dogs are euthanized rather than allowed the time to see if they can develop spinal walking.
abilities.

**Post Lumbosacral Instructions**

In most patients undergoing surgery for lumbosacral disease, your pet’s pain will start to diminish within a week or two. The neurologic deficits will usually take a little longer to resolve. Patients with mild neurological deficits will recover within four to six weeks while patients with severe weakness can take up to three or four months to fully recover. If your pet’s neurologic signs do not improve, additional testing or surgery may be needed. If your pet had any incontinence, the prognosis is much more guarded for a full recovery.

**Follow Up Instructions:**

- Recheck and suture removal in ten days: Suture / Staple removal / Dissolving sutures
- Recheck every two weeks after suture removal until your pet is fully recovered
- Tegaderm clear bandage can be left on until it falls off or at suture removal
- Start antibiotic tonight
- Start pain medication tonight. If your pet has increased pain after running out of medication, please call and ask for a refill
- Start Medrol medication tonight (cortisone for inflammation if residual disc material)
- Make sure your pet is urinating and defecating daily (if not, please have him/her checked)
- Call Dr. Carrie Grace at 615-498-3486 or email her at carriegracedvm@aol.com to discuss acupuncture treatments which have been shown to reduce recovery time significantly
- Start massage, range of motion, standing exercises on day three and swimming if available (cover incision with Vaseline)
- Call Rod Newman, MS, CCRP to schedule your initial physical therapy consultation at 615-414-4867 or email him at rnewman@caninerehabnashville.com (cost included in fee)