Preventing Quadriceps Contracture

Quadriceps contracture is a severely debilitating condition in which the quadriceps muscle group (large muscle groups on the front of the thigh) develops fibrosis (scar tissue) and adhesions due to fractures above or below the stifle joint (knee). This results in a shortening of the muscle and the inability to flex the knee. This loss of normal range of motion prevents your pet from using the leg. Treatment is very expensive and painful surgery that, unfortunately, is rarely successful. You can see why preventing this serious complication is extremely important to the full return to normal function of your pet.

The best way to prevent this problem from happening is to strictly follow your veterinarian’s instructions and perform the post-surgical physical therapy without any deviation. The two most important things to remember are the following:

1. If your pet is very rambunctious and you do not think you can keep him confined to the leash for at least two weeks after surgery (with tranquilizers if needed), then your doctor may elect to put a simple bandage on the leg which keeps the knee in a slightly flexed position with the paw off the ground for a short period of time (usually seven to ten days).

2. With or without the bandage, you MUST gently flex and extend the knee 20 – 30 times three times daily. Spend at least ten minutes during each session. Do not bend the knee to the point of discomfort but you must be able to get some motion in the joint and place a mild stretch on the front of the thigh.

If you see the range of motion of the affected leg diminishing at all during your pet’s recovery, notify your doctor immediately so corrective action can be taken before the muscle contracts beyond repair.