



## TPLO / TTA Rehabilitation Home Care Instructions

Rehabilitation begins soon after your pet's surgery. Over the course of 10-12 weeks your pet's activity will be allowed to gradually increase to build muscle mass, improve flexibility and enhance bone healing while minimizing complications. The degree of activity should progress with your pet remaining comfortable. Since increasing duration and minimizing intensity is a primary goal, explosive activities such as running, jumping or playing with other pets are not allowed during the first three rehabilitation periods. The goals of this rehabilitation program are to: 1. improve your pet's comfort, 2. increase the mobility of the operated limb, and 3. accelerate the rate of recovery, thereby improving your pet's quality of life by getting them back to his/her normal level of activity as soon as possible.

### **Period 1: (0-2 weeks post-op)**

During the first two weeks post-op, patients should be taken out for short leash walks only to void using the sling on slippery / uneven surfaces and on stairs. A 4-6 foot leash is recommended to control your pet during walks. Retractable leashes are not allowed.

Apply a cold pack to the surgical area for 10-15 minutes twice daily. Wrap the cold pack in a light towel to protect the skin from frostbite. The cold pack therapy will help to reduce swelling and discomfort. Ice the surgery site for at least 5-7 days post surgery

Gentle massage of tight rear limb muscles and gentle knee flexion and extension exercises can be initiated early post-op, though many patients are resistant until the post-op swelling has resolved.

### **Period 2: (2-8 weeks post-op)**

Please consult with your surgeon prior to attempting these activities.

During this period, the main goals are to: 1. achieve normal joint range of motion and full weight bearing on the operated limb, 2. increase the amount of leash-only activity without increasing lameness.

Slow, short leash walks 3-4 times a day are encouraged. Begin with 3-5 minute walks and gradually increase the length of these walks over time. Do not go on individual walks longer than 20 minutes during the first 4 weeks post-op. Your pet will benefit more from several short walks in a day, rather than one longer walk. Instead of doubling the length of a walk, double the number of walks. Encourage walking at a slow pace to ensure the operated limb is used with every step.

Begin physical therapy (PT) sessions after taking your pet out for a short walk to warm up his/her muscles, increase blood flow and prepare the limb for range of motion exercises. Massage of tight muscle groups can be used prior to these sessions to help relax muscles of the thigh. The main goal of these PT sessions is to maintain the current joint range of motion and eventually restore a full range of motion.

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Range of motion exercises can be performed with your pet standing or lying on his/her side. Begin passive range of motion exercises by grasping the lower limb with one hand while holding the front of the thigh (above the knee) with the other hand. Gradually flex and extend the limb watching your pet for signs of discomfort such as tensing of muscles or pushing and pulling away from you. Try to slowly flex the limb towards the body until the first signs of discomfort are noted, go a little further and hold for a 5-7 count. Next fully extend or straighten the limb and hold for a 5-7 count. Repeat these exercises for 2-5 repetitions, 2-3 times daily for 4-6 weeks post surgery. By the end of this period, you should be able to perform 5 repetitions of the passive range of motion / stretching exercises 2-3 times daily without much resistance.

At this point the amount of medication needed to keep patients comfortable is variable, though most only need periodic anti-inflammatory medication. The rule of thumb is "use the lowest effective dose" to keep patients comfortable. Your pet should be comfortable and relatively tolerant of the exercises.

Gauge your pet's comfort by watching for struggling or significant resistance to the exercises. If your pet is very resistant to manipulation his/her activity level or amount of therapy should be reduced. Begin the PT exercises slowly and cautiously to avoid being bitten as your pet may initially be uncomfortable with the exercises. If your pet is painful during PT exercises, discontinue the exercises and contact our office.

Sit-to-stand exercises can also be initiated midway through this period. The goal of this exercise is to encourage the patient to sit squarely and then rise from a sitting position using the affected limb to push off. You can have your dog sit with the affected limb towards a wall to prevent him/her from kicking that limb out to the side. Initially 3-5 repetitions should be performed. Work up to 20+ repetitions over time. These exercises should be performed twice daily.

### **Period 3: (8-12 weeks post-op)**

**Only begin this level after x-ray evaluation and approval from your surgeon.**

The goals of period 3 are to improve strength and endurance and to begin transitioning patients back to jogging on an extended lead and eventually back to off leash activity. Free run of the house is also allowed during this period with the exceptions of jumping off/on of high furniture (high beds) and flights of stairs should still be walked on leash.

Massage and stretching exercises can be continued, especially if your pet seems stiff or lame during or after walks. Longer walks are encouraged during this period to help build stamina and muscle mass. At this stage the more mileage, the better as long as your pet's lameness isn't increasing. Walking hills is encouraged during this period. As with all transitions, begin with short walks in the hills gradually increasing duration as your pet tolerates.

When your pet is comfortable with walking up / down hills, you can begin leash walking them up and down stairs as a form of exercise. Try to stay on concrete or carpeted stairs to prevent slipping. Walk slowly to ensure the operated limb is used consistently. As your pet becomes comfortable with stairs you can gradually increase the number of repetitions going up and down.

If available, swimming for 10-15 minutes several times a week can also be beneficial. As with the previous activities, begin slowly and increase the length of time as your pet tolerates.

Once patients are able to go on extended (1+ hour long) leash walks and able to run on lead including running hills without lameness, they are next allowed off leash activity in a yard without other pets for short periods that are gradually increased until a normal level of activity is achieved. The final transitions include playing freely with other dogs in larger areas and lastly retrieving as these activities tend to be the most stressful on joints.

**Summary:**

During all three periods, particular attention should be paid to any sudden deterioration in progress. If your pet appears to have stiffness or increased lameness at any time after a PT session or extended walk, the level of activity should be decreased and a slower rate of progression established. It is very important that the patient be kept comfortable during the rehabilitation period to maximize his/her willingness to participate and benefit from these activities.

Some patients might not achieve a normal level of activity even with ongoing PT depending on your pet's level of arthritis prior to surgery. Physical therapy plays an important role in obtaining and maintaining the best possible function.

If your pet is overweight, it is very important to initiate a weight loss plan immediately after surgery. The goal is to get your pet down to an ideal body condition score (5 on a 1-9 scale) to minimize long-term added stress on his/her joints. Weight loss can also help reduce the progression of arthritic change over time.

If your dog does not appear to be making adequate progress or you have any questions please contact us any time: 608-274-7772. [surgery@mvsvets.com](mailto:surgery@mvsvets.com).