



TPLO / TTA Rehabilitation Home Care Instructions

Over the course of 10-12 weeks your pet's activity will gradually be increased. This will help build muscle mass, improve flexibility, and enhance bone healing, while minimizing complications. Activity should increase at a rate that ensures your pet remains comfortable. The goals of this rehabilitation program are to:

1. Improve your pet's comfort
2. Increase the mobility of the operated limb
3. Accelerate the rate of recovery, thereby, improving your pet's quality of life by getting them back to their normal level of activity as soon as possible.

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

During the first two weeks post-op, your pet should be taken on short leashed walks for 5-10 minutes only to void, using the sling on slippery / uneven surfaces and on stairs. Try avoiding any deep snow, steep hills, or sharp turns during this time. A 4–6-foot leash is recommended to control your pet during walks. Retractable leashes are not allowed. If your pet is frequently lifting the limb, a slower pace and keeping them on a short leash, should help increase their willingness to weight-bear on the operated limb.

Apply a cold compress to the surgical area for 5-10 minutes twice daily until swelling and bruising of the leg has resolved. 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 surgical site for at least 5 days post-surgery. After this time, you may switch to warm compresses to help with comfort and increase blood flow to the area. Warm compresses may be performed prior to passive range of motion (PROM).

The following paragraphs review starting passive range of motion exercises. It is safe and even recommended to start these immediately after taking your pet home. However, if your pet is uncomfortable following surgery, they may be reactive to having their operated limb touched and even try to bite. We prioritize the safety of you and your pet above all else. If your pet does not tolerate range of motion without resisting or fighting it, please wait to start it until period 2 of recovery.

After bringing your pet home, gentle massage of tight rear limb muscles and gentle PROM can be initiated. Starting this early will help increase blood flow and help prevent any adhesions from forming post-surgery. Some pets are resistant until the post-op swelling has resolved and it is okay to stop therapy for a few days or limit the repetitions if your pet becomes overly stressed. Physical therapy can be performed with your pet standing up or lying down. If standing, support your pet against your legs to ensure that they do not feel unstable when you lift their operated leg.

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Begin PROM 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/pulling away from you. Place the joints through a PROM that is comfortable for your pet, do not try to over stretch their leg. Begin the PROM exercises slowly and cautiously to avoid being bit as your pet may initially be uncomfortable with the exercises. Gauge your pet's comfort by watching for struggling or significant resistance to the exercises. If your pet is very resistant to the exercises their activity level and amount of therapy should be reduced. Repeat these exercises for 2-5 repetitions, 2-3 times daily for 4-6 weeks post-surgery as your pet permits. For videos demonstrating range-of-motion exercises, visit our website at <https://www.mvsvets.com/pet-owners/informational-links/>

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

Please complete the remote or in-person 10–14-day post-op recheck 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.

Continue slow, short leashed walks up to 3-4 times a day. Your pet will benefit more from several short walks in a day, rather than one longer walk. Begin with walks around 10 minutes and gradually increase their length over time. This can usually be done in increments of about 5 minutes per week as long as your pet is tolerating them well without an increase in lameness. Do not go on individual walks longer than 20 minutes during the first 4 weeks post-op. By the 8-week recheck, the goal is for your pet to be able to tolerate 30–45-minute leashed walks. Encourage walking at a slow pace initially to ensure the operated limb is used with every step.

Continue PROM sessions after taking your pet out for a short walk to warm up their muscles and increase blood flow. Massage of tight muscle groups can be used prior to these sessions to help relax muscles of the thigh. The main goal of these PROM sessions is to maintain the current joint range of motion and eventually restore a full range of motion. Try to slowly flex the limb towards the body until the first signs of discomfort are noted, and hold for 5-7 seconds. Next, extend or straighten the limb and hold for another 5-7 seconds. 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. Most pets only need periodic anti-inflammatory medication for sore days. The rule of thumb is “use the lowest effective dose” to keep pets comfortable. Your pet should be comfortable and relatively tolerant of the exercises.

You may start to perform weight-shifting exercises. With your pet standing on a non-slip surface, use treats to have your pet lean forward and back or side-to-side following the treat. This will cause their center of gravity to shift and will improve their balance and the strength of the leg over time. You may also gently place your hands on both sides of their hips and gently push them to alternating sides and let them correct themselves. Be mindful about how much pressure you apply: You want them to have to re-adjust their balance without having to side step or risk falling. Once they are comfortable with these activities, you may also have them practice weight-shifting by lifting the opposite hindlimb.

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 them from kicking that limb out to the side. Initially 3-5 repetitions should be performed. Work up to 10+ repetitions over time. These exercises can be performed twice daily.

In the last 3-4 weeks of this period, you may incorporate some additional activities to help build up your pet's strength and avoid risk of re-injury as their activity increases. While walking, you may have your pet do figure 8's and walk up and down hill on leash. You may also have your pet walk on and off curbs and in long grass/snow/shallow water for some resistance. You can continue weight-shifting as outlined before, but optionally move onto more unstable surfaces such as cushions or mattresses on the ground.

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

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

The goals during this period are to improve strength and endurance, transition patients back to jogging on an extended lead and introduce off leash activity. Free run of the house is also allowed during this period except for jumping off and on 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, so long as your pet's lameness is not increasing. Walking up / down hills is encouraged during this period.

When your pet is comfortable with walking up / down hills, you can begin leashed walks up / 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 the opportunity exists and is enjoyed by your pet, 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 can go on extended (1+ hour long) leashed walks and are able to jog on lead without lameness, brief off leash activity without other pets is acceptable and can be gradually increased until a normal level of activity is achieved. The final transition includes playing freely with other dogs in larger areas and retrieving as these activities tend to be the most stressful on joints.

Summary:

During all three periods, 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 PROM session or extended walk, the level of activity should be decreased and a slower rate of progression established. It is important that your pet be kept comfortable during the rehabilitation period to maximize their willingness to participate and benefit from these activities.

Some patients might not achieve a normal level of activity even with ongoing physical therapy depending on your pet's level of arthritis prior to surgery. Formal physical therapy at a facility may be in the best interest of your pet in some circumstances. These include chronic CCL tears, bilateral CCL tears, other

pre-existing orthopedic injuries, obesity, arthritis, and advanced age. Physical therapy plays an important role in obtaining and maintaining the best possible function.

If your pet is overweight, it will be important to initiate a weight loss plan immediately after surgery. The goal is to get your pet to an ideal body condition score (5 on a 1-9 scale) to minimize long-term added stress on their 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 if you have any questions, please contact our office at 608-274-7772 or email the Surgery department directly at surgery@mvsvets.com.