



Referral Animal Hospital, P.A.

DAVID T. CROUCH, DVM
DIPLOMATE, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

STIFLE REHABILITATION REGIMEN

Until recheck examination at WCVS (6-8 weeks post-operatively) has confirmed satisfactory healing and progress, the patient's activities are severely restricted. If adequate healing has been achieved, the rehabilitation regimen is initiated. During this time period the patient's activities are gradually increased in order to stretch the surgery scar tissue and rebuild muscles. The degree of activity should progress with the patient remaining comfortable. Since increasing duration and not intensity is the goal, explosive activities such as **running, jumping, playing, frolicking, furniture or stairs are not allowed** during the rehabilitation period. Remember that your pet already has degenerative joint disease ("arthritis") and our goal is to make him/her as comfortable as we can for as long as we can.

Throughout the rehabilitation process the dog is allowed to go as far as he/she is able while remaining comfortable. To judge the dog's comfort, watch the dog when he/she gets up from following exercise and rest. If invigorated and excited about more activity, the dog is comfortable. If the dog gets up with stiffness and complaint, then the amount of activity should be reduced.

Weeks 1-2:

The first two weeks after surgery your pet needs **strict activity restriction**. They are allowed outside on a short leash under direct supervision to eliminate only, then right back inside to be confined.

Weeks 3-6:

After skin healing has occurred and the skin sutures or staples have been removed, physical therapy may begin.

Swimming is an excellent low-impact activity that will encourage muscle strength and improve the range-of-motion of the affected stifle.

Passive range-of-motion exercises several times a day are crucial to success. This exercise consists of flexion and extension of the stifle with 15-20 repetitions per sessions. Hold the flexed and extended positions for 2-3 seconds for each repetition, as your pet will allow. He/she will be uncomfortable at first but diligence is the key to success. These exercises are performed 4-5 times daily. Your pet may also respond favorably to massage of the affected stifle during each session. Remember, too much physical therapy is far better than not enough physical therapy!



Referral Animal Hospital, P.A.

DAVID T. CROUCH, DVM
DIPLOMATE, AMERICAN COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

Leash walks starting on week 3 after surgery are acceptable if your pet will do so. With your dog on a short lead, begin with short walks of one block (or equivalent) and see how the dog responds. Continue at this distance for a few days. If the dog remains comfortable, you may increase the distance of the walk by one city block per week. Continue increasing the distance of the walks every week as the dog's comfort level permits. If the animal appears uncomfortable with the increased distance, cut the length of the walk back to the last distance that the animal was comfortable at. Your pet will benefit more from several short walks in one day rather than a single long walk.

Weeks 7-9:

During this time period, the walks are continued with the animal on a long lead. This allows the dog freedom to trot back and forth, increasing the usage of the leg. As distances are more difficult to judge at this point, it is important to monitor the dog's comfort level closely during this stage of the rehabilitation.

Weeks 10-12:

At this time the dog is allowed mild activity off lead. The area should have no other animals or distractions around. The dog should remain under the voice control of the owner. No jumping, chasing a ball or frisbee, or playing with other dogs or cats is permitted. Avoid any other activities where the dog's full concentration is thrown into the activity without any regard to his/her body.

Your pet is undoubtedly unaware that he/she has lifelong activity limitations; therefore, it is your duty as the pet owner to be their "guardian angel" to minimize further injury to the surgical repair of his/her abnormal stifle.