



How to be successful!

## Post-Operative Orthopedic Surgery Survival Tips For At-Home Care

### Recovery Time

After most surgery, pets will need to be confined for a period of time to ensure uncomplicated healing and complete recovery. This period of time can last from 2 weeks to 2 months, and in some cases even longer.

- 2-3 weeks = OCD, excision arthroplasty, abdominal surgery
- 3-4 weeks = Patellar luxations, some internal/abdominal surgery
- 5-6 weeks = Young animal fractures, dislocations, spinal surgery
- 6-8 weeks = Most fractures, any surgery involving cutting bone, L7-S1 fusion, other fusions
- 8 weeks = Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy (TPLO), Triple Pelvic Osteotomy, DArthroplasty; Proximal Radial Sliding Osteotomy, Tibial and Femoral Osteotomies, Total Hip Replacements

### Confinement

Your discharge instructions will contain additional information about your pet's specific confinement requirements, but we have listed some general guidelines below.

Confinement is 'house-arrest' or restriction to a limited area in an effort to prevent explosive or prolonged physical exertion:

- Cats: A small crate, covered playpen, shower stall.
- Toy breed dog: A medium crate, covered playpen.

- Medium breed dog: A large crate (wire or plastic) or X-pen (exercise pen)
- Large breed dog: Large to giant crate (wire or plastic) or X-pen.
- Giant breed dog: A giant crate (wire or plastic) or preferably an X-pen.

Your pet should be confined away from other pets. Small children should be discouraged from playing around this area as it may incite your pet to jump and play. Use a clip on the cage so small children cannot open it and allow the patient to escape.

Should you not be able to crate your pet without causing further injury, please consider a small bathroom, laundry room, or pantry/kitchen area that can be cordoned off using an adjustable baby-gate.

## **Traveling**

Even a small fender bender accident can cause irreparable injury to a pet which has just been released from surgery! We do not want a recovering or injured animal standing or moving about in the car. Your pet should be transported in a crate or lying down on the seat or floor with someone holding on. If you have other pets, please leave them at home when picking up.

## **Once home**

You will need to take your dog outside to relieve itself. This is NOT for a walk around the block or neighborhood! This is a short walk to a small area for eliminations only then directly back inside. Your pet should be discouraged from using the dog door until you receive clearance to do so (typically 6 week post-operatively). Perform these short leash walks three-four times daily. We suggest that the first person up takes the dog out, followed by the last to leave for work, the first person home, and last to go to bed. If you are also able to get home at lunch, great!

## **Acepromazine: Tranquilizer (chemical restraint)**

Following surgery, your pet will need enforced inactivity for a period of several weeks. Strict exercise restriction means: no running, jumping, hopping on and off furniture, or climbing stairs unassisted. If you have other animals in the house, or children that play with or come in contact with your recovering pet, please keep them separated unless you can fully supervise all interaction. Activity must be limited to very short leash walks for the purpose of your pet going to the bathroom only. The patient should be kept in an enclosed area such as a small yard, dog run, or a small room in the house preferably with solid footing to prevent slipping.

Many patients refuse to be self-limiting with this mandatory exercise restriction. To help with this we have prescribed acepromazine. This is a potent promazine-based tranquilizer, the intent of which is to "take the edge off",

allowing the patient to be content to be less active in the post-operative phase of their rehabilitation. Acepromazine has a variable effect from animal to animal. Because of this, it can be difficult to know the exact dosage appropriate for your pet. We recommend an average dose, based on your pet's size, and that dose is then adjusted by you to achieve the desired effect. Please note that it is extremely difficult to overdose and cause significant harm with this drug. A high dose will result in severe tranquilization, however, which will be manifested as a deep sleep. Some pets can be difficult to arouse from this deep sleep for several hours. Typically a high dose will cause your pet to sleep for approximately 12 hours and then wake up and behave normally. Side effects that your pet may exhibit while on acepromazine include altered breathing patterns, shivering, blood-shot eyes, and protrusion of the third eyelid (a pink fleshy eyelid that people don't have, in the inner corner of the eye socket).

Conversely, animals that have been tranquilized with acepromazine can be roused from their tranquilization. That is, should they experience an appropriate stimulus they can be roused from their rest and temporarily act normally. However, once they have been replaced in a quiet environment, the tranquilizer will again take hold and they will resume tranquility.

Acepromazine is readily metabolized by the liver. As you continue to administer this drug, the liver becomes more adept at ridding the drug in your pet's system. Hence, you may need to increase the drug dose on a regular basis to continue to achieve the desired sedative effect. We recommend increasing the drug by 1/2 tablet at a time as needed. Generally, the drug should be given three times a day, as necessary to achieve an appropriate level of tranquilization. It takes 20-30 minutes for the drug to achieve maximal effect. Obviously, the longer your pet needs to be on Acepromazine, the more judicious your use of the drug should be: within several weeks the liver becomes so adept at processing the drug that an extremely high dose of the tranquilizer no longer has any effect. Interestingly, within a few weeks of discontinuing acepromazine, your pet will once again become susceptible to a very low dose of the drug. This drug is not addictive. In very few cases some pets may have an abnormal reaction to acepromazine and become hyperactive, aggressive, and/or suffer a personality change. This is extremely rare and the effects resolve as the drug wears off. Some pets, (especially spayed females) may also have mild urinary incontinence while on the drug.

Some people do not feel comfortable with the side effects of this medication. Remember, the purpose of placing your pet on this drug is to decrease the tendency to become overactive and undo or damage the repairs made during surgery. If you can achieve tranquility through confinement and environmental control, or if your pet's inherent personality is mellow, then minimal use of this drug would be needed. Also, you are more than welcome to simply lower the dose, to achieve fewer of the untoward side-effects.

**NOTE: Trazodone.** As an alternative to acepromazine, some doctors will prescribe trazodone. In human beings this is a night-time sleep aide and anti-anxiety medication. This particular medication, in our pets, can have an additional sedating or calming effect and may be used as an alternative to acepromazine. Unfortunately, the

calming/sedating effects of Trazodone are not always reliably effective in eliminating the wind-up effect of cabin fever in our convalescing post-operative orthopedic patients. Therefore, if you're having trouble with this particular medication in enforcing the exercise restrictions necessary for surgical success, please discuss this with your veterinarian and consider switching to acepromazine.

## **NSAID's (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs)**

Your pet has been sent home with an anti-inflammatory drug. These medications are all aspirin-like drugs from a group that include Deramaxx, Rimadyl, Etogesic, Advil (NEVER! Used in felines), Zubrin, Prevacoxib, and Metacam. These eliminate pain and discomfort and the cycle of inflammation and irritation associated with surgery, injury or degenerative processes (arthritis). As such, NSAID therapy is an important adjunct during the post-operative period. These drugs also have an important role in the early rehabilitation process and recovery.

With the recent FDA withdrawal of Vioxx there has been a great deal of attention given to many NSAID medications; most of this attention points to adverse reactions. It is important to keep in mind that all medications, including NSAIDs, can have side effects, and that for every bad reaction to the drug, there are many thousands of doses administered without any side effects whatsoever!

Since the goal of NSAID treatment is to maximize benefit while reducing side effects we would like to help you identify a list of signs that you could see at home to determine if your pet is having an adverse reaction. Adverse reactions to NSAID therapy include decreased appetite, episodes of vomiting, lethargy, diarrhea, increased water consumption or change in stool color and consistency (dark, tarry). This list is not exhaustive, and other less common symptoms may be seen. If you have any questions regarding adverse reactions, do not hesitate to contact us with your concerns.

Please keep in mind, an overwhelming majority of dogs do well and tolerate these drugs without any of these side effects. However, if your pet is one of those that do manifest any of the above symptoms, please discontinue administration of the medication, and contact us immediately.