

Post-Operative Care for Dogs Following CCL Surgery

Post-operative rehabilitation following CCL surgery is an important part of the recovery process for your dog. The goal of therapy is to gradually return the leg to normal function over the course of the next 3 to 4 months. Dogs tend to use the leg too much too soon after surgery and can cause repair failure. Alternatively, if your dog does not use the repaired leg enough excessive scar tissue can form and limit his/her ability to use the leg.

There will be skin sutures at the surgery site. These will need to be removed approximately 2 weeks after surgery. Please make an appointment for us to do that for you. We will also be able to evaluate the stability of your dog's knee at that point and help make recommendations about his rehabilitation. Your dog needs to leave the skin sutures alone. If he/she insists on licking the surgery site, an Elizabethan collar will need to be put on your dog in order to prevent this from happening. Your dog will also receive medications to go home. These are pain meds to help him/her feel better as well as antibiotics to help prevent the surgery site from becoming infected. It can take up to 2 weeks for your dog to start using the leg again and will gradually start using it more over the following 4 to 6 weeks. Your dog's exercise should be restricted and supervised for around 8 to 12 weeks after surgery. This typically means short leash walks (the short here refers to the length of the leash not the time), limiting play with other animals, and confining the dog to a crate or small room when not supervised.

Week 1: Perform 10 to 20 repetitions of passive range of motion exercise 3 times a day. Passive range of motion involves moving all joints of the leg through a normal range of motion. Each joint, particularly the knee, should be flexed and extended. This may be painful for your dog, especially initially. You should avoid using excessive force. This will help prevent excessive scar tissue from forming. This should be followed by placing an ice pack on the dog's knee for 20 minutes afterwards. Your dog may be reluctant to put any weight on his/her leg during this first week. Your dogs should only be allowed to walk on flat surfaces (no stairs) and should be on a leash, even for short potty breaks. Short, controlled, slow (to tolerance) leash walks are acceptable. These walks typically last around 5 minutes.

Weeks 2 & 3: Walks are gradually increased up to 15 to 20 minutes 3 times a day. These are short leash walks at a pace that your dog is comfortable with. If there is still swelling present on the knee, ice packs can continue to be used following walks. Continue passive range of motion exercises.

Weeks 4 through 6: Walks are now increased to 20 to 30 minutes in length and should be done 2 to 3 times a day. Going up and down stairs should still be avoided at this point but you can encourage your dog to stand on his/her hind legs by picking up the front legs. You can also begin to have your dog walk in circles or "figure 8's".

Weeks 7 through 12: Leash walks can be increased to 30 to 40 minutes at a time and can begin to incorporate hills or ramps on these walks. Your dog can now begin to go up and down stairs slowly. You can also start to play "tug of war" with your dog. By the end of 12 weeks, your dog's leg has healed but may still be weak. It may take several months for your dog to build the muscle back up to where it was before the surgery.

As a result of your dog's CCL rupture, he/she will begin to develop arthritis in that knee. Surgery should help to slow the progress of arthritis, but it is extremely rare for surgery to prevent it from occurring entirely. We recommend putting your dog on a joint supplement for the rest of your dog's life. This will help slow the progress of arthritis formation as well. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call us at 570-386-3088.