CRUCIATE LIGAMENT SURGERY: Home Care Instructions

Your pet has had surgery for the treatment of a ruptured cranial cruciate ligament. The damaged ligament has been removed and a prosthetic nylon ligament placed on the outside of the stifle (knee) joint (but under the skin) to stabilise it until it heals (this will take between 6-12 weeks). Implant removal is generally not necessary. Most dogs will be putting some weight on the leg within ten days post-surgery. There should be a progressive increase in weight-bearing over the following weeks. There is about a 10% chance of a late meniscal injury occurring, which usually manifests as severe lameness. If this should occur, it usually requires a small surgery to remove the damaged portion of meniscus, which alleviates the pain.

Medications

- Anti-inflammatory: ____________
  Label instructions on the packet should be followed.
- Analgesic patch (fentanyl). This will be removed at the 4 day recheck.
- Tramadol tablets - Label instructions on the packet should be followed.

Re-examination

Re-examination is advised in 4 days to remove the dressing and examine the wound, but sooner if you are concerned. There is often some bruising and swelling around the surgery site; this is normal and should resolve uneventfully. Weekly rechecks and disease modifying osteoarthritic agent (DMOAA) injections (eg cartrofen, pentoxy, synovan) are advised for 4 consecutive weeks; please make appointments with your regular veterinarian for these. Please make an appointment to see your veterinarian in 6 weeks - we will assess the degree of recovery and discuss the rehabilitation exercise program.

Post-operative exercise

Strict rest (no free exercise allowed) for the next 6 weeks is necessary to allow healing and stabilisation of the joint. This includes no jumping (including into and out of cars) and definitely no stairs, or crawling under the bed/lounge! Please try to keep your pet on flat surfaces only, and preferably not on slippery surfaces eg tiles and polished floors. If this is unavoidable, then consider putting rugs down or non-slip matting (which can be purchased by the metre from hardware stores). After the recovery period, a progressively increasing lead exercise and hydrotherapy (or swimming) program is required to strengthen the muscles and improve joint mobility. Free exercise off the lead is not advised until after the rehabilitation program has finished.

Prognosis

Your pet has a good chance of improvement in lameness. Most patients make an excellent recovery within three to six months of surgery. Osteoarthritis is likely to progress, regardless of treatment; this does not necessarily influence a satisfactory outcome. The progression of OA can be slowed by using nutraceuticals (eg Glyde®, Joint Guard®, Sasha’s Blend®, 4Cyte®). It is most important not to allow your pet to become overweight and to maintain a reasonable level of fitness. If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

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CRUCIATE LIGAMENT SURGERY: Rehabilitation Program

While the surgery is important to alleviate pain and restore adequate function to your pets knee, of equal importance is the rehabilitation. Patients with little to no active rehabilitation invariably take much longer to return to function, or fail to return to full function. Here is a guide to what can be done to help return your pet to function as quickly as possible. There are several excellent veterinary physiotherapists in South-East Queensland that can help with your pets recovery (see below).

**Week 1**
- For the first 3 days, please try to apply an ice pack to the knee for 10 minutes on/10 minutes off for 40 minutes every 3-4 hours
- After 3 days, if your pet will tolerate it, start physiotherapy:
  - Let your pet guide you as to duration and intensity
  - This should be started gently and slowly, using the resistance in the leg as an indicator of comfort level, i.e. if you start to feel resistance or any vocalising, then that is the limit for that day. Use this a guide for the next day.
  - Imagine your pet riding a bicycle; this is the movement you want to replicate.
  - Try to put the whole leg through a full cycle between 20-30 repetitions 2-4 times daily
  - Alternate backwards and forwards
  - Strict rest and confinement
  - Short leash walks (10 min max) in backyard only for toileting purposes only
  - NO running, jumping or stairs!
  - Should be toe touching the ground intermittently

**Week 2**
- DMOAA injection #1
- Strict rest and confinement

**Week 3**
- DMOAA injection #2
- Short leash walks (10 min max) in backyard only for toileting purposes
- Should be taking a little weight on the leg, may be 3 legged lame when walking outside
- Continue physiotherapy daily

**Week 4**
- DMOAA injection #3
- Continue physiotherapy daily
- Should notice increase in range of motion and comfort levels
- Should be taking weight on the leg most of the time, but still noticeably lame
- Start sit to stand exercises to increase muscle mass of quadriceps and hamstrings:
  - Command your pet to sit
  - Just as your pet is about to put bottom on the ground, walk them forward a step or two
  - Repeat this several times over the course of the day (liver treats help!)
  - Provided your pet is comfortable with this exercise and the lameness isn’t worsening, continue this exercise each day, and gradually increase the daily frequency

**Week 5**
- Please make an appointment for the last DMOAA injection and follow up X-rays.
- Continue physiotherapy daily
- Should notice increase in range of motion and comfort levels, should be taking weight on the leg most of the time, with moderate lameness

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CRUCIATE LIGAMENT SURGERY: Rehabilitation Program

Week 6
- If the radiographs reveal good healing and your pet has made a good recovery, you can start some CONTROLLED activity:
  - Hydrotherapy and/or swimming is the best form of controlled exercise, as it is supportive/buoyant and non-concussive on the knee joint
  - Alternatively, you can start short CONTROLLED leash walks. It is VERY important that this is performed under very controlled settings, as any uncontrolled activity may result in implant failure or prolonged recovery.
  - The easiest way to do this is providing an environment where there are no distractions or potential for interactions with dogs, cats, birds, possums etc., so definitely NOT at the dog park, or in other areas where these distractions may occur. The backyard or local park/oval at off-peak times would be best.
  - Ensure your pet is on a leash AT ALL TIMES, and cannot get off the leash/collar. A head haltie or harness may provide more control.
  - Start with some physiotherapy and sit-stand exercises at home to warm up, then go to a grassed area (backyard, oval) and ON A LEASH, start slow paced walking.
  - Use your pets’ comfort levels as a guide to how far or fast to walk. Most dogs by this time should be able to cope with 5 to 10 minutes walking once to twice daily. Do so for a week, then gradually increase the duration by 5 minutes per week. If there is any noticeable increase in lameness, then decrease the duration to the previous level, and maintain that level for an extra week before increasing the duration.

Week 7 onwards
- Continue physiotherapy and sit-stand exercises a few times a day.
- Provided your pets’ lameness has continued to improve, and your vet was happy with your pets’ progress at the last visit, increase duration of CONTROLLED LEASH walking by about 5 minutes once to twice daily.
- If at any stage the lameness worsens or you are concerned, please contact us.

Animal Physiotherapists & Hydrotherapy

Animal Physiotherapy Solutions
Lindsey Connell
14 The Centre at Springwood
Corner of Lexington & Logan Roads
Underwood QLD 4119 Australia
http://vss.net.au/services/physiotherapy/

Brooke Marsh
431 Tanawha Tourist Drive
Tanawha, QLD 4556
Sunshine Coast
Australia
www.ncvs.net.au/3662_Therapists.html

Hydrotherapy
The Canine Fitness Centre
3385 6090
583 Oakey Flat Rd, Morayfield, 4506
www.caninefitnesscentre.com.au

Mobile Rehabilitation Therapist
Alpha Mobility Solutions
Dr Laurence Oner
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