

WOODVALE PARK

VETERINARY HOSPITAL



Unit 10, 923 Whitfords Avenue, Woodvale WA 6026

Phone: (08) 9409 6968

www.woodvaleparkvet.com.au

Aimeroy Pty Ltd ABN 53 165 893 701

SPINAL (DISC) SURGERY:

POST-SURGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are four factors that influence a dog's recovery from spinal surgery:

1. The amount of permanent damage that has occurred to the spinal cord before surgery was performed.
2. The success of the surgery in removing the pressure from the spinal cord.
3. The motivation of your dog to make the effort to relearn to walk.
4. Your persistence in performing physical therapy and enhancing the dog's motivation.

The items which have been marked should be taken to maximise your dog's chances of having a full recovery.

1. Bathe areas of the skin. This may be necessary as often as three times per day. Baby shampoos are usually suitable but the pH of the dog's skin is different from ours, and it is better to discuss the type of shampoo with your veterinary surgeon.
2. If your dog has no urinary control, we will show you how to empty the bladder. Please follow the instructions carefully.
3. The bowels should move when they are full, even if your dog has no conscious control. If no bowel movement occurs for 48 hours, please call.
4. Since the spinal cord has been decompressed with surgery, exercise and movement will not cause further damage. Your dog should be allowed to drag itself around the house on carpeted surfaces. However care should be taken that drag lesions are not caused. (See 7 below) This is important in creating a desire to walk. Cage confinement kills the desire to walk so we do not encourage that except for times when no one is home. Good

judgement should be used in preventing situations that might result in a fall, i.e. on furniture, stairs, etc.

5. **IF YOUR DOG LIKES TO SWIM**, place it in a tub of water about 2-4 inches over its head. Allow it to swim while you support it. Your support is essential in preventing drowning.
6. To increase motivation: Make a sling from a bath towel by folding the towel lengthways until it is about 6" wide. Support your dog by placing this sling under the belly and holding the ends of the towel above. Use it to assist walking for 5 minutes 2-3 times per day.
7. If skin abrasions occur on the feet or legs due to dragging, cover them with socks or a bandage. If they are not covered, apply an antibiotic ointment 3 times per day to promote healing and prevent infection. (If the feet are covered, be careful not to get the tape so tight so as to affect circulation.)
8. If a soft swelling occurs under the incision, please make an appointment for us to check it. This usually means a seroma has formed. A seroma is a collection of fluid under the skin at the site of the wound. Even though it may be up to 2" wide and the entire length of the incision, it is not an emergency, but it will require drainage.
9. Your dog's appetite should be good. If not, please let us know
10. To understand how walking will return, you should understand some basic aspects of how the spinal cord works.

There are 3 levels of function of the spinal cord:

Proprioception: This represents the dog's awareness of where the limbs are located in space.

Motor: movement of the muscles

Sensory: feeling

Proprioception is the first function lost and the last to return. Conversely, sensation (feeling) is the last function lost and the first to return. Walking is a complicated feat requiring muscle control, feeling, coordination, and proprioception. When ALL of these are present, walking can occur. Until proprioception is regained, your dog cannot walk. When proprioception is regained, walking returns in an all-of-a-sudden fashion. This is much like a baby learning to walk. The baby will be developing the functions needed to walk for several months. When they all come together, the baby

walks. Do not be discouraged; your dog may go several days or weeks without walking.

1. Improvement should occur in several ways prior to actual walking. An increase in muscle tone during physical therapy is the most easily observed one. The rate of improvement probably will not be noticeable from one day to the next. If you can detect improvement over a 3 day period, you should remain very optimistic. If 5 days go by without improvement, please return for a recheck so that we may assess progress and your efforts.
2. Dogs that have been paralysed are prone to bladder infections. If your dog develops an unusually strong odour to its urine, or appears to strain, please let us know so that we can check for a bladder infection.
3. Because your dog is doing so well, it may want to resume normal activity immediately. If this happens, it may have a set back in 1-2 days. Do not encourage or allow running or jumping.
4. Keep your dog away from other active dogs to prevent the possibility of being injured.
5. Your dog is overweight, this reduces the chances of recovery. While in hospital we have attempted to control diet, please try to continue with this diet as follows:-

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6. The purpose of physical therapy is to prevent the muscles in the legs from becoming weak or atrophied (wasted away). Perform physical therapy, as demonstrated, 3 times per day on each rear leg. This should be done in 30 second increments on each leg until 2 minutes per leg is achieved with each session. This is very important in keeping muscle tone present. Vibro massagers are also useful for this purpose.