

Post-operative Information: Acetabular Fracture (Internal fixation with plate, screws &/or wires)

Your pet has had a fracture of the hip joint that was repaired with a metal screws, plate and/or wires. These implants are surgically attached to the bones and bridge the fracture to keep it stable until the body heals the fracture to the original bone/joint strength. Healing time is required before the joint is strong enough to accept normal activities. The majority of patients will have their implants for their entire life, and do not have long term activity restrictions.

ACTIVITY RESTRICTION x 8 weeks

- Your pet may be groggy for the first few days. He or she may whine or appear more anxious than usual; this may indicate pain/discomfort or side-effects of the medications. Please call your veterinarian for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.
- Please keep your pet in a small area with secure footing (small room or penned off area with carpet) for the next 4 weeks. Thereafter, he/she may be confined to one level of the house with no free access to stairs. Use baby gates, etc. to prevent access to stairs. Do not allow jumping on/off furniture. Please do not allow any playing, running or jumping. For dogs, use a short leash when going outside to urinate/defecate.
- For the first 1-2 weeks, your pet may need assistance when walking; use a sling under his/her belly or under each rear leg (like a rock climbing harness) to support his/her weight. Continue this protective measure until he/she is very strong on all legs.
- Your pet will feel like fully using the leg before the joint is healed. Please continue the restrictions during this difficult time when he/she is feeling "too" well! Failure to do so may cause serious healing problems.

INCISION CARE

- Please look at incision twice daily. It should be dry, slightly red along the margins, and slightly swollen/thick on the edges. Over several days, it should lose redness and swelling. Problems to call your veterinarian about: discharge, gapping, excessive swelling.
- Do not allow your pet to lick or chew the incision. Dogs tend to want to lick early in the healing period and this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection. During the first 2 weeks, please use an E-collar to prevent incision damage, if you must leave your pet unattended.

BANDAGE CARE (if applicable)

- Some patients will come home with an Ehmer Sling (pronounced "ee-murr") for the first 1-2 weeks after surgery. This is an extra precaution to protect the joint. This bandaging technique is designed to keep the leg flexed up and the hip held snug. It can be difficult to maintain in some patients, especially male dogs. Check the edges of the Ehmer sling daily for signs of pressure sores, slippage or soiling. Please see your veterinarian if there are any problems.

PROGRESS EXAMS

- Return to your veterinarian in 10-14 days for a progress exam. Skin healing and leg function will be evaluated, sutures will be removed, the Ehmer sling will be removed (if present) and any physical therapy questions will be addressed.
- If your pet is doing well, the next visit will be 6-8 weeks after surgery. Leg function will be evaluated, x-rays may be taken of the hip to confirm joint integrity, and physical therapy recommendations will be adjusted.
- Your pet should start using the operated leg more strongly each week. By 6 weeks, he/she should be 90% recovered. If he/she suddenly deteriorates or does not appear to be progressing well enough, please return to your veterinarian for re-evaluation.

DIET

- Do not make any adjustments to your pet's diet until he/she has resumed normal attitude, appetite, energy level and bathroom habits. In the first few days of recovery, encourage eating with supplements like meat baby food and canned dog food as treats. Be aware that the above activity restrictions may cause weight gain. To prevent this, you may feed 3/4 of the usual amount of food during the next 2 months. Your veterinarian will re-weigh your pet at the progress exams to monitor weight.
- Glucosamine/chondroitin supplements might have some beneficial effects in these cases but that this has not been clearly established. You and your veterinarian should discuss whether or not these products would be helpful for your pet for the next 3-4 months.

PHYSICAL THERAPY REGIMEN (We can also recommend professional physical therapy assistance in the Twin Cities. Studies have shown that a formal program can decrease post-operative recovery time. Please let your veterinarian know if you are interested in a referral.)

- Our lives are often very busy, so if you must err, err on the "do less" side of these instructions. Less physical therapy will result in a slower return to function, but more aggressive physical therapy by a non-professional too early may result in failure of the implants and surgical repair.
- *Week 1:* Apply ice packs (wrapped in thin cloth) to the incision area twice daily for 10-15 minutes. Baggies of frozen peas work well for this, or make an ice pack by freezing 2 parts isopropyl alcohol to one-part water in a zip lock bag. Continue 5 days. (You may also use ice after the exercises below if your pet seems uncomfortable.)
- *Week 2:* Range of Motion Exercise-- Have your pet lie on his/her good side. Apply a warm compress to hip/incision area. Grip the foot with one hand and slowly and gently push the foot up into flexion of all joints; hold for 5 seconds. Slowly pull the foot and push the leg down and back into full extension of all joints; hold for 5 seconds. Repeat this motion 15-20 times twice daily. This exercise should not be performed to the point of pain or resentment. Continue 4 weeks.
- *Week 7:* Active exercise (for dogs) -- Place your pet on a short leash and have him/her walk at your side. Walk outside on even/solid footing for 10 minutes twice daily. Continue 4 weeks.
- *Week 8:* Hip Stretch Exercise—Perform this exercise on carpeting. If you have a large exercise ball (1-2ft diameter), place the front end of your dog across the ball so they are “standing” on their rear legs. *Slowly* roll the ball forward so the hind quarters are stretched to the point when your pet takes a step forward with his/her hind feet. Slowly roll the ball backward so he/she steps backward. Repeat this slow-motion stretch for 15-20 repetitions twice daily. Continue 2 weeks.
(If you do not have an exercise ball but can safely lift the front end of your dog, use this technique. Kneel in front of your pet and lift his/her legs up; support his/her front end. Slowly rock backwards so your pet's hind quarters are stretched to the point when your pet takes a step forward with his/her hind feet. Slowly lean forward so he/she steps backward with the hind feet. Repeat this slow-motion stretch for 15-20 repetitions twice daily.)
- Swimming is wonderful rehabilitation exercise (for some dogs) when performed correctly. You may allow controlled swimming after week 6. Controlled swimming requires that your pet not jump or leap into the water; walking into the water until it is deep enough to swim is required. Throwing balls to fetch often results in sudden jumping and lunging, which can cause serious problems in the healing phase. Do not over extend your pet; start with short excursions (5 minutes) and increase duration and frequency gradually.

LONG TERM LIFESTYLE

- After the hip is healed, there are no restrictions on activities for your pet. A gradual return to full function should occur, to allow for a smooth return of muscle function and strength following the restricted period.
- There may be a slightly increased risk of degenerative joint disease (“arthritis”) later in life due to the joint trauma. Please have your veterinarian evaluate any lameness or pain you notice associated with the operated leg.