

Forelimb Amputation



One of the most useful and efficient ways to convey information to you about your pet is via the written word. We carefully craft these notes to give you helpful information and accurate expectations around your pet's surgical experience.

Please read this. *Please save it and read it during each stage of the recovery process.* Surprises make for a stressful time for everyone.

Photo and video examples may be found on our website: www.directvetsurg.com in the Pet Owner Portal under "DVS Resources".

Your pet has had his/her front leg surgically removed. This is a major surgery, and you should expect your pet to need 2-3wks to fully adjust to the new circumstances. *During the healing time, your pet may experience neck pain or sudden twinges of pain because of the surgical disruption of the major nerves to the forelimb. This will subside over these first few weeks. Use the pain medications liberally to support your pet during this time and do not expect or ask him/her to be active.* After the recovery and adjustment period, dogs generally do very well with their new 3-legged status and normal daily activities, although their agility and endurance will be reduced.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please keep a note of your questions as you and your pet progress thru recovery and address them to your primary care veterinary team. Our surgery group will contact your primary care team on **Day 2** (after their phone follow-up with you) and **Day 14** (after your recheck visit with them) to check in on your pet's progress and see if you have had any concerns or questions. This method will maintain continuity in care and an accurate patient medical record.

First few days postop

MONITORING

Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe, indoor location without free access to stairs for the next 24 hours as he/she recovers from anesthesia and surgery.

Your pet may be groggy for the next 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 primary care veterinary team for assistance with medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.

Monitor appetite and attitude. *If both do not steadily improve over the next 2-3 days,* please call your primary care veterinary team or return for progress evaluation and problem-solving.

You can expect your pet to have a bowel movement within 5 days. Some animals take longer than others depending on when they last ate prior to surgery and when they started

eating after surgery. It may be abnormal in color and consistency for 2-3 days. If you have any concerns, please speak with your primary care veterinary team.

Please confirm that your pet has urinated within 24 hours of returning home. If he/she does not, or you notice any problems related to urination, please speak with your primary care veterinary team.

Closely supervise your pet's movements over the first 3-4 days when s/he will be groggy from anesthetics and pain medications. Do not allow access to dangerous situations/locations (i.e. stairs, furniture, small children, other pets). Limit activities to necessary events only (on leash/out to go to the bathroom; access to food/water.)

Use a sling under the rump if needed during the first 7-10 days to assist and prevent falling on slippery or uneven surfaces. A cloth "grocery bag" with holes cut for the remaining limb and slit up the edges is a nice homemade option for sling walking during this challenging recovery time.

Alternatively, the *Help 'em Up harness* (see company website) is a very useful tool that your dog can wear during the restricted period that allows you to have a quick "handle" to grasp by the shoulders and by the rump to assist your pet to rise and lie down, climb/descend stairs, save from a slippery floor, etc. (This is not designed for amputees, but may be helpful.)

MEDICATIONS

It is likely that you have been prescribed one or more medications (given by mouth) for your pet over the first 2-3wks of recovery. During the discharge appointment or shortly thereafter, please make sure you understand:

- what each medication is being used to treat,
- what side-effects may develop, and
- whether or not the medication should be refilled and continued.

BANDAGE CARE (IF PRESENT)

A clear, plastic bandaid may have been applied to the incision (Tegaderm). This will protect the incision from infection from the environment and a wayward pet tongue! It is useful for up to 3-5 days. You may remove it like a "bandaid" at any time. If it is hard to peel off, waiting longer may make for easier removal. There is no urgency in taking it off unless fluid is accumulating underneath.

A padded bandage *may have been* applied to the operated site. The goal of the bandage is to provide pressure to the surgical site to minimize swelling and improve patient comfort for up to 3 weeks. You may remove the bandage or return to your primary care clinic for removal. If the bandage slips below the incision or becomes soiled or wet, please remove it by simply cutting away one layer at a time (use caution, avoid skin). **A "ThunderShirt" is

an easy substitute for a medical bandage, providing the goal of firm compression to the surgical site. (The ThunderShirt is a stretchy clothing product that you can purchase online, in pet stores or through your primary care veterinary clinic.)

Week 1-2 postop

MONITORING

Closely supervise your pet's movements over the first 3-4 days when s/he will be groggy from anesthetics and pain medications. Limit activities to necessary events only (on leash/out to go to the bathroom; access to food/water.)

Please look at the incision twice daily. It should be dry, slightly red along the margins, slightly swollen/thick on the edges with a light crust down the center. Over several days, it should lose redness and swelling.

Problems to call your veterinarian about:

- gapping (the edges should be exactly touching)
- ongoing or new discharge (other than small amount of crusting)
- swelling (other than slightly raised skin near edges).

Some bruising is normal and will resolve in 5-7 days.

The occasional patient will have more extensive bruising and/or swelling on day 2-3. If this develops, please let your primary care veterinarian know; a visit or sending photos will help them characterize the issue and decide on a course of action. The vast majority of the time, this is a transient issue that will follow a typical 5-7 day course resolving.

It is not uncommon for a seroma to develop under the incision; this is a pocket of normal tissue fluids that develops in a high motion/loose tissue area such as the shoulder region after an amputation. If the swelling is smaller than a plum, please monitor. Warm compresses applied to the area will encourage the fluid to reabsorb more quickly (3-7 days.) If the seroma progressively enlarges, please have your veterinarian assess the problem.

Do not allow your pet to lick or chew the incision. Pets tend to want to lick early in the healing period and scratch later in the healing period; this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection.

TEST PENDING

If there were any samples removed for testing, they will be submitted and results usually will be available in 5-10 days. Your primary care veterinary team will contact you with test results and make any treatment changes as needed.

PROGRESS EXAMS

Please return to your primary care clinic in 10-14 days for a progress exam. **If no skin stitches are present, you may instead submit by email-- incision photo, video clip and any questions.** Skin healing will be evaluated, ambulation will be assessed and any questions you have will be addressed.

DIET

The **most** beneficial and **least** expensive treatment/prevention for arthritis and orthopedic health (and general health) over the lifetime of your pet is maintaining your pet on the lean/thin side of normal his/her whole life. Any orthopedic condition can progress with arthritis over time due to excessive, wear & tear (**made more significant now by the new 3-legged lifestyle**); carrying less body weight will relieve some of this stress from the joints. Good parameters to monitor body condition are:

- 1) you should be able to feel the ribs and pelvic bones, but not see them;
- 2) your pet should have an "hour glass" figure when viewed from above looking down;
- 3) your pet should have a tucked-up belly when viewed from the side.

Glucosamine/chondroitin supplements ("chondroprotectants") may have some beneficial effects in patients with previous orthopedic injury, but this has not been clearly established. High-dose (medicinal dose) fish oil may improve comfort in arthritic joints longterm. You and your veterinarian should discuss whether or not these products would be helpful for your pet over her/his lifetime.

RESTRICTIONS

Avoid any rigorous activity for 4 weeks; no running, jumping, playing or anything that feels like "exercise". For dogs, short, leashed walks around the yard to urinate/defecate are fine. Walking around one level of the house is fine. Prevent all pets from jumping up and down from furniture, etc. A bad landing or an awkward take-off can result in significant pain.

Minimal, supervised/assisted access to stairs is advised during restricted period. Use baby gates, etc. to prevent free access to stairs during this restricted period. When helping dogs navigating stairs (up and down), have a hand/leash on collar/harness and a leash/safety-strap under the belly to prevent slips, stumbles, falls.

Please use a short (~6ft), hand-held leash when dogs are outside to urinate/defecate. Confine your pet to a small area/room/crate when unattended. Please do not allow your pet to run, jump or play during this restriction period.

The *Help 'em Up harness* (see company website) is a very useful tool that your dog can wear during the restricted period that allows you to have a quick "handle" to grasp by the shoulders and by the rump to assist your pet to rise and lie down, climb/descend stairs, save from a slippery floor, etc.

If your pet's personality-type challenges these restrictions, discuss options for medicinal-assistance for your pet to make restrictions easier to manage (i.e. Trazadone, Gabapentin, Tramadol, other).

PHYSICAL THERAPY REGIMEN

Week 1: Apply ice packs (wrapped in thin cloth) to 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 ziplock bag. Continue 7 days to help with pain.

Long-term lifestyle

The functional prognosis for dogs treated surgically with amputation is considered good; lifestyle accommodations for routine tasks may benefit comfort, avoid falls and reduce wear & tear on the remaining forelimb. Following the 4 week recovery period, there are no recommended limitations to their lifestyle.

Checklist:

HOME MONITORING AND PROGRESS CHECK-IN WITH VETERINARY TEAM

- Pet attitude and appetite—Are these improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Pet mobility—Is this improving daily? What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Incision health—Is redness and swelling going away? Is there discharge or moisture? (Photos taken close-up and at different angles are helpful for your primary care veterinary team,)
- Pet pain level—What are your observations? What are your specific concerns?
- Other

Based on your own experience through this, we welcome and encourage suggestions to this information that may help future patients and their people. Pay it forward! (directvetsurg@gmail.com)

--The DVS Crew