



Post-Operative Rehabilitation and Physical Therapy

Underwater Treadmill (UWT), also called hydrotherapy, is a comfortable and effective therapy for a variety of conditions in animals. With gentle coaching from the rehab team, dogs do remarkably well in this quiet, relaxed environment. If a patient needs assistance, a technician will accompany them in the tank during their session.

UWT therapy is very low risk and improves range of motion, strengthens muscles, and boosts endurance. The buoyancy of the water allows for minimal impact on the joints, while increasing resistance on the muscles. Water temperature is kept at a comfortable 92-95 degrees Fahrenheit, which helps to decrease pain and increase flexibility. The water level and treadmill speed are customized for each patient, and is adjusted as the sessions progress.

UWT therapy is also beneficial for patients with soft tissue injuries, neurological impairments, osteoarthritis, and muscle weakness. It's highly effective as a means of post-operative care for patients who have undergone limb amputations or orthopedic surgery and can help speed up recovery.

We recommend the following facility for UWT:

Cascade Park Animal Hospital
16820 SE McGillivray Blvd, Vancouver, WA 98683
(360) 892-2122
www.cascadeparkanimalhospital.com

Acupuncture is also recommended as a great tool for rehabilitation. Acupuncture is the insertion of fine needles into specific points on the body that stimulate a healing process. Acupuncture is often used to reduce pain either in our athletes, weekend warriors, or geriatric patients. It can be used post-operatively to help bring an animal back to pain-free function as part of a multimodal rehabilitation program. Acupuncture can be performed at Orchard Hills Animal Hospital by Dr. Nya Gilmartin.

Laser therapy: Orchard Hills Animal Hospital is proud to have a Companion Class IV laser for use in treating chronic conditions and post-operative pain. This FDA-approved therapy is safe, fast, and painless, and reduces inflammation by stimulating the body's own healing capabilities at a cellular level. The anti-inflammatory benefits of laser therapy continue for up to 24 hours after a session. Some patients find their laser therapy sessions so soothing that they fall asleep!



At-Home Physical Therapy

Here are several exercises you can do at home to help with your dog's rehab. These should all be done slowly and with controlled, gentle movements. Watch your dog closely and be ready to assist them if needed. Treats and praise are a must!

Back steps: With a treat in your hand, slowly walk towards your dog and gently push into them, causing them to take a few steps backwards. Keep the treat mid-level—if you hold it too high, the dog will sit; if you hold it too low, they will lay down. Try to achieve at least five good steps going forward and backward in each session and keep all movements slow and controlled.

Side steps: With a treat held in front of your dog's face, encourage them to take steps to the side. Have your dog stand with their side directly in front of you and their head to your right or your left. Take a slow step towards your dog and encourage them to sidestep away from you while nibbling the treat in your hand. You may need to gently bump into them with your legs, and you can also use a leash around their belly or a hand on their side for extra guidance. Do this going to both the right and the left for at least five steps per session. This exercise focuses on leg strengthening and body awareness and should be slow and controlled.

Sit/down/stand transitions: With this exercise, it's important to focus on precise positions. The rehabilitation team recommends teaching "Sphinx-style" down and sit positions. This means that when moving from a standing position to a sitting one, the dog should bring their rear legs forward to sit without moving their front legs. The dog should sit squarely without leaning on one hip. When getting up from a sitting or down position, the dog should push straight up without stepping forward.

Weight shifting: Start on a non-slip surface with your dog in a standing position. Support your dog with a harness as needed, and gently push your dog off balance—side-to-side and back-to-front. To maintain the standing position, your dog must use strength, coordination, and balance.

Walking (slow, controlled, and leashed): Slow walking encourages weight bearing and balance. The goal is to have your dog engaged and tired at the end of the day, but not exhausted the next morning. Begin with multiple five-minute walks per day for one week and monitor closely for exhaustion. If this goes well, the following week's walks may be lengthened by one or two minutes each, or the number of walks per day may be increased. This will be a slow progression! If your dog is struggling, decrease their time or frequency of walks to make the exercise more manageable.

Walking (uneven surfaces): This exercise is great for improving coordination and balance. Slowly walk your dog over an unstable surface, such as a traditional mattress, an inflatable mattress, cushions, or any surface that is safe and challenges your dog's balance. Be ready to offer support if needed.



Static/yoga stretching: Gently straighten the affected limb until a slight resistance is felt. Hold the limb in that position for five seconds. Then, gently and slowly bend the limb and hold for another five seconds. Repeat this motion ten times. This helps to gradually increase your dog's range of motion on the affected limb.

Cookie stretches: With your dog in a standing position, use a treat to encourage them to turn and lift their head. Motion from nose to one shoulder, and then the other. Then, motion nose to sky, nose to chest, and nose to floor. Finally, motion nose to one hip, and then to the other.

Circles (spins): This is a small circle encouraged by a treat, in both clockwise and counterclockwise directions. You should not need to move during this exercise, only your hand and a treat should be traveling in a circle. The spin should be slow, gentle, and controlled.

Stairs (incline and decline): Encourage your dog to slowly climb stairs one at a time. A treat or toy may be used as motivation. After ascending the stairs, have your dog slowly walk back down in a controlled manner. Watch each leg to be sure it touches the ground and be ready to assist them if they lose balance.

Additional recommendations

Harness: A harness (such as a [Help 'Em Up Mobility Harness](#)) can help with surgery recovery and changes due to aging. This harness has easy-to-reach handles placed near your dog's hips and shoulders, which allows you to lend support at any time. The Help 'Em Up harness is designed to stay on a dog for extended periods of time and doesn't need to be re-adjusted or rigged with each use—it's on hand and ready to be used at any time.

Visit their website at www.helpemup.com for more information.

Points to remember

- Post-operative rehab and physical therapy is crucial for a positive outcome with your dog's healing and recovery.
- If you notice your dog has increased lameness, soreness, limping, pain, or is holding up/not using a limb, contact us as soon as possible at (360) 835-2184.