



Sample Post Operative Discharge Instructions

This document provides a sample of the home care instructions given after a dog undergoes orthopedic surgery. When you pick up your pet, usually the day following surgery, you will receive instructions tailored to your pet and their procedure. This sample outlines what to anticipate and how to prepare for at-home care post-surgery. Staff are available to answer questions before and after surgery to support a smooth recovery process.

Diagnosis: Left CCL Tear

Procedures: Left Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy (TPLO)

Summary of Recovery:

The recovery period typically lasts 10-12 weeks. Orthopedic surgery recovery requires balancing minimizing excessive activity to avoid complications with gradually increasing controlled movement. Dogs are encouraged to bear weight on the operated leg as soon as possible to promote bone healing and maintain muscle mass. During recovery, progressively longer leash walks serve as a key part of rehabilitation.

While outside, dogs should always be kept on a leash. Indoors, measures should be taken to prevent running, jumping, sudden energetic activity, interactions with other animals, and slipping.

The first few days at home after surgery can be stressful, but your dog should start feeling more comfortable and using the operated limb within 1 week.

Incision:

Monitor the incision twice daily. Swelling and bruising are expected after surgery and may increase over the first 3-5 days post-operatively. Swelling may migrate further down the leg, collecting at the hock (ankle). This should gradually decrease over the following week. Please give us a call if you notice any fluid

drainage, if the incision is opening up, or if you have concerns. You can take pictures of the incision to monitor it and to share with us if you have concerns.

Elizabethan Collar (E-collar/ Cone):

Your dog is being sent home with an E-collar (cone) to protect the incision from chewing and/or licking. **It is essential that the E-collar remains on at all times for the next 2-3 weeks to prevent complications.** We will let you know if it is OK to remove the E-collar at the 2 week recheck. You can remove the E-collar when your pet is eating, if you are directly supervising them, and it should be immediately replaced when they are finished.

Restricted Activity:

It is required that your dog remain indoors on a non-slip surface and be confined to a kennel, crate, or small room when not under direct supervision. **Outdoor access should be limited to leash walks for elimination purposes only. Running, jumping, or playing must be strictly avoided throughout the recovery period.** These activity restrictions are anticipated to continue for **10-12 weeks** to promote optimal surgical healing. In certain instances, your surgeon may advise an earlier or later return to activity based on your dog's recovery progress.

Diet:

After surgery you do not need to change the *type* of food your dog eats. But we do recommend cutting back the *amount* you feed by 20-30% during the healing process so that your dog does not gain weight since they will be less active. In fact, it is crucial that your dog achieve or maintain a lean body condition ("on the skinny side of normal") as this will decrease arthritis development and help keep your dog in good overall health.

Rehabilitation/ Physical Therapy

Post-operative rehab helps your dog recover after orthopedic surgery. Professional physical rehabilitation is especially useful for dogs reluctant to use their leg, working or sporting dogs, or those with significant muscle loss. Ask about where rehabilitation is available, or visit rehabvets.org to find a veterinary rehabilitation professional near you.

At-Home Rehabilitation

- **Ice-pack:**

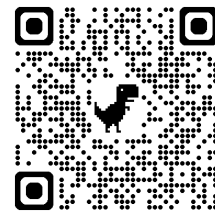
You can apply an ice pack to the surgical site for the first 3 days after surgery to help reduce inflammation, swelling, and pain. A commercial ice pack can be used and should be wrapped in a clean dish towel or pillowcase. Apply the ice pack over the incision and knee and then wrap it with an Ace bandage to apply mild compression. Ice-packing should be performed for 15-20 minutes, 3-4 times/ day.

Here is a video demonstration of applying an ice-pack:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdeuzHTuzpQ>

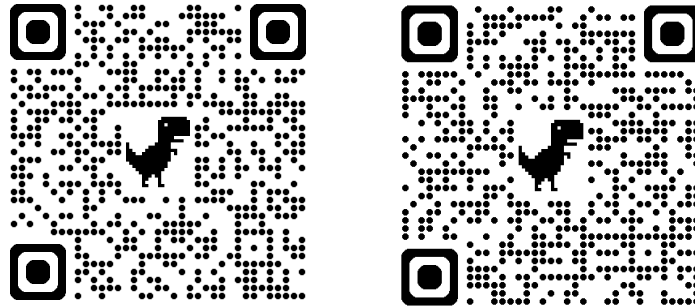
- **Leash walks:**

- Sling support: Use a sling or harness to act as a safety net to prevent slipping or falling. This is often helpful in the first few weeks after surgery, if needing to navigate stairs in and out of the house, and should always be used if walking on icy ground.
- Weeks 1 and 2 (up to the time of recheck appointment):
 - On leash for up to 5 minutes, 3-4 times/ day or as needed for elimination purposes. Stay on flat ground as much as possible. OK to go up and down steps to get in and out of the house if needed. Use the sling for support on steps.
- Weeks 3-10 (up to the time of recheck x-rays):
 - Add 5 minutes per week to the walks if your dog is using their leg with every step. These walks should be slow and controlled and on leash. Stay on flat ground as much as possible, but you can walk on different surfaces such as grass, flat gravel trails or sidewalks. By 8 weeks you should ideally be going for 25-30 minute walks most days, as long as your dog is not lagging behind on the walk and not limping more at the end of the walk or later in the day.



- **Enrichment:**

- If your dog is used to an active lifestyle, recovery from surgery can be boring (which can be stressful for you and them). Engaging their brain with food puzzles can help. You can feed your dog their meals using food puzzles or a snuffle mat. But it is important not to feed extra calories during recovery so that they don't gain weight. Food puzzles should be used in place of the normal food bowl.
- Here are a couple of examples of slow-feeders:



- If you feed kibble, you can consider soaking the kibble for 10-15 minutes, then spreading it in the slow feeder and freezing it. You can also stuff Kongs with canned pumpkin and freeze these for a low-calorie treat.

Medications Being Dispensed

This is just an example; specific prescriptions will be based on your dog's individual needs, including any concurrent medical conditions or other medications they are taking. In general, we will prescribe 2 forms of pain relief, antibiotics, and a sedative to be used as needed.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID) (such as carprofen): This is a pain reliever that also reduces inflammation and will be recommended for the first 2 weeks after surgery. Dogs that have arthritis will typically benefit from a longer duration of NSAIDs so that they are comfortable during the rehabilitation period. Depending on the degree of arthritis in the operated joint or elsewhere in the body, NSAIDs may still be needed once they have fully healed to allow comfortable activity and exercise.

Gabapentin or pregabalin: this is a pain reliever that is also used to reduce anxiety. It can cause sedation, especially when first started or at higher doses. In some cases, we will continue this medication until they are fully healed specifically for the sedative effects.

Antibiotics: Most dogs will be prescribed a short course of antibiotics after orthopedic surgery. If they have a history of allergies or skin infections, a longer course may be recommended.

Trazodone: This is a sedative that is often prescribed to help reduce anxiety in dogs recovering from surgery. It provides mild to moderate sedative effects, especially when combined with gabapentin. The goal of using sedatives is that your dog is calm, but still very alert and able to interact with you and go for walks, they just aren't quite as eager to zoom or jump!

****Please give a dose of gabapentin and trazodone the night before and morning of any recheck visits. This helps reduce the stress of the visit and may reduce the amount of additional sedation needed for their x-rays.****

Recheck Exams

Please schedule the following post-op rechecks with us. Additional rechecks could be needed if concerns arise.

- **2 Week incision check:** We will check your dog's incision and remove any skin sutures (if present).
- **8 week recheck and x-rays:** We will need to see your dog back for x-rays to ensure that the bone is healing and they are recovering as expected from surgery. If your dog is healing as expected, this will be the last scheduled recheck and you will be provided instructions to gradually return your dog to their normal activity over the following 4-6 weeks. In some cases, we will recommend an additional recheck.

When to Contact Us

If your dog suddenly becomes more lame or was using the operated leg and then refuses to do so, please contact us for advice. These signs may occur because the dog has had too much activity too soon, and with a few days of rest and pain medicine, they can get back on track. But it is important to keep us informed because these signs could also be an indication of a greater problem, such as implant failure, infection, or other complication.