



Southern Counties

VETERINARY
SPECIALISTS

Rehabilitation for post cruciate surgery

Information Sheet

**Southern Counties Veterinary Specialists
Specialist Referral Service**

What is cruciate disease?

Cranial cruciate disease can affect dogs of any breed, sex, or age although a higher incidence is reported for large breed and overweight dogs. A ruptured cruciate can also be seen in cats. Surgery is necessary to stabilise the unstable knee joint caused by the traumatic rupture of the cranial cruciate ligament (CCL). (see cranial cruciate ligament rupture)

What happens to the tissues if left untreated?

Some patients have a partial rupture for a length of time before a complete rupture. Before surgery if the full/partial rupture is untreated for a length of time, osteoarthritis (OA) develops in the knee (stifle). In addition to OA, muscle loss can result in all areas of the affected limb. Ligaments and tendons also become stiff from lack of mobility in the stifle joint.

How does rehabilitation help recovery?

Rehabilitation can be given when a patient has a partial rupture to maintain muscle bulk. The partial rupture will be treated with medication to control the pain and the patient will be on a restricted exercise regimen given by the clinician. As a result of the restriction and subtle discomfort, the patient will not be consistently putting full weight through the affected leg. Some muscle loss will develop, the joint will become stiff and the joint fluid will have some inflammation. In the interim, rapid progression of OA will be developing due to the partial instability of the joint.

Rehabilitation can be useful at this stage, to maintain joint range of movement (ROM), muscle strength, and functional challenges. The surgical procedure stabilises the stifle joint, slowing the progression of OA and further trauma to the other tissues that surround and protect the stifle. Any



pain and discomfort will be lessened by surgery.

The rehabilitation team rehabilitate the cruciate injury that has received surgical treatment.

When does rehabilitation start post-surgery at SCVS?

Early rehabilitation starts on day 1, usually 2/4 hours out of the theatre. The aim is to minimise pain and inflammation with cryotherapy (cold), massage to aid circulation and range of movement (ROM) to maintain joint movement. The stifle will have some swelling, inflammation, heat and discomfort. Rehabilitation performed as soon as possible helps to aid a speedier recovery.

What kind of rehabilitation is performed whilst my pet is in hospital?

Most patients are taken to the physiotherapy department to have their rehabilitation treatment. Once they are settled we will start the rehabilitation.

A cold pack, wrapped in a damp cloth is applied to the incision site, 3/4 x daily. The cold pack is placed NOT pressed on incision, as this can be painful. 5 minutes is the minimum amount of time, it can be up to 15 minutes, no longer. The skin is checked regularly to feel if the area has become cold to the touch. The cold

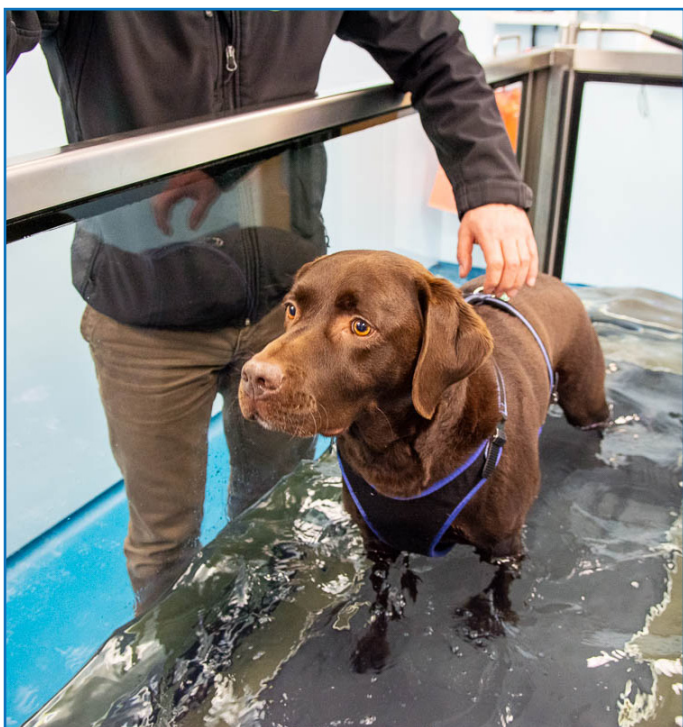
reduces heat, inflammation and provides some analgesia along with the medication provided.

Gentle massage is started and gentle movement of the joints, x 10/15 repetitions. These are repeated until patient is discharged from the clinic

Will I be expected to carry on the rehabilitation at home?

The above treatment is shown to you at the discharge by either a veterinary intern or someone from the physio department. You are given written instructions with a cold pack. We offer a free physio discharge up to 5 days from the day your pet had surgery.

Apply the cold pack for 3 days, if there is heat at the site on day 4 you should get the surgical site checked for infection. On day 4 change the cold pack to heat, warm with hot water, check temperature before applying. Apply for up to 2 weeks, following with massage and movement of joints. DO NOT apply heat if you are concerned that the incision site feels hotter than surrounding tissues.



Should my pet need more rehabilitation?

At approximately 14 days postoperatively, we will examine your pet, observing how well they are walking, examining the surgical site, manipulate the stifle, apply range of movement and stretches and observe movements of the limbs when challenged with land exercises. At SCVS we have an underwater treadmill (UWT) to improve muscle strength and develop the muscle loss gained from home confinement.

Exercise plans are designed to rehabilitate patients back to their highest level of function. A home plan of exercises and manipulation will be shown to you so that you can continue them at home. The exercises given will encourage movement of the stifle in a controlled manner. Gentle weight bearing exercises will be provided to increase function and strength, and to prevent compensatory postures and complications from developing.

How long does my pet need physiotherapy for?

The rehabilitation programme should match the patient's recovery. Some patients need longer than others because they were initially evaluated with multiple functional problems. The average number of sessions are 6 to 10 if the recovery has not been complicated by undue setbacks. Unfortunately, our pets are unaware of the consequences that can occur if they decide to perform an undesirable action.

Can I go somewhere else for physio?

If you have travelled a long distance, make an appointment with an animal physiotherapist closer to you, your vet may know someone local. They will need to send a form asking permission from the surgeon who is treating your pet at SCVS.



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