

Postoperative recovery following orthopaedic procedures

The following instructions are applicable for postoperative recovery after an orthopaedic surgery. They can be used for aftercare of joint surgery or fracture repair.

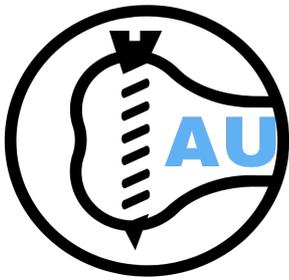
- In the first week, the focus should be on reducing the postoperative inflammation, managing the pain and encouraging use of the limb.
- From week 2 to week 4 postoperative, the focus is on promoting healing, preventing soft tissue contraction and increasing confidence in using the operated leg.
- From week 5 to 8 postoperative, the focus is on further promotion of the healing and increasing the confidence. This is done by increasing the length of walks but not the intensity. This is a difficult time for the owner as the patient wants to do more like nothing has happened but the leg is not strong enough to support full exercise. Be careful at this stage as most of implant failures happen at this stage.
- From week 9 to 12 postoperative, steady increase of exercise is introduced. This is the time when the length and the intensity of the exercise is introduced. However, return to full function is not yet allowed.

As always with major surgery, please keep close contact with your vets and please don't shy away from asking anything you are unsure of. We are here to help.

Hot/cold packs

Providing the incision is closed, clean and dry, in the first 3 - 5 days postoperative cold compresses are welcomed. You can use ice packs or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel (dry towels prevent coldness to reach the skin) and apply on the surgical site for 10-20 minutes every 8 to 12 hours. Try to avoid the incision site, especially if the plastic adhesive dressing is not attached to the skin. Cold therapy has an anti-inflammatory effect and speed up the healing. Please note that not all patients tolerate the cold compresses; try to be diligent and use common sense.

From day 3 - 5 to day 14 postoperative, warm compresses should be used. Warm packs or a hot water bottle in a dry towel can be applied to the surgical site. Apply the warm compress for 20 minutes every 8 to 12 hours. Warm therapy improves the blood flow and circulation.



Massages

They are used to stimulate blood flow and reduce the swelling. Some patients like it, some are very intolerant. Work from toes upward and try to gently squeeze the soft tissues. You should be firm but gentle. Try avoiding the surgical incision.

Massage to leg 2-3 minutes at a time, two to four times a day.

Physiotherapy

Passive range of motion

Passive range of motion (PROM) exercise means flexion-extension of a joint (bending and straightening) without voluntary muscle contraction. In essence, it means the owner is flexing-extending a joint without the active involvement of the patient. PROM should be started as soon as possible. The main reasons for doing PROMs are: prevention of soft tissue contraction, prevention of tight scar tissue, stimulation of the blood supply and healing. In humans, PROMs are started from day 1 postoperative. Also in humans it is recommended to flex-extend the joint until one feels tension but not pain. Obviously this threshold is difficult to know in dogs and the owners will have to use subtle/obvious changes of behaviour to identify the change from tension to pain.

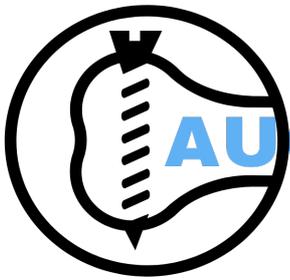
If the surgery was on a joint, obviously the said joint is the area of interest. If the surgery was on a bone (such as a fracture) then the areas of interest are the joint above and below the bone. For example, for cranial cruciate surgery, the stifle is the region of interest; for a thigh bone fracture, the hip and the stifle are the areas of interest.

PROMs consist of the repeated flexion-extension of the joint to the maximum allowed by the patient and by the body. A cycle is a flexion-extension. You should aim for 10-12 cycles which should be repeated two or three times a day.

PROMs are usually employed from day 1 to day 20 postoperative. According to the progress your pet, PROMs may be needed for longer or shorter time. Check with your vet or with us if unsure.

Before starting PROMs, the region of interest should benefit from warm packs applied for 10 minutes for 10 minutes. After PROMs cold packs should be used for 10-15 minutes.

Please note that professional physiotherapy help is available. Please ask your vets for details.



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Hydrotherapy

Hydrotherapy is very underutilised in veterinary medicine but it has tremendous benefits for the recovery of the post surgical patient.

Hydrotherapy should be considered as soon as the incision has healed, usually from 10-14 days postoperative. In the first 6 weeks or until the follow up radiography confirms bone healing, **ONLY** underwater treadmill should be utilised. Swimming in the pool is **NOT RECCOMENDED** in this early postoperative stage.

You can find more information about your regional hydrotherapist from your local vets or from our website.

