



# Arizona Animal Wellness Center

## Post-surgery Recovery-Orthopedic

Orthopedic procedures are much more involved than many routine procedures in veterinary medicine and it's helpful to set realistic expectations before your pet arrives home. To best help your pet recover from extensive surgery, you will need to provide an environment that both keeps your pet comfortable and secure.

### **Right after picking up your pet and the first night.**

Expect to be one-on-one with your pet that first night. Their body has just undergone trauma and stress and they don't usually sleep well initially. It can be very helpful to sleep near your pet the first night post op which will be calming and reassuring and will allow your pet to sleep better. A small X-Pen or a leash to confine your pet to their bed will be helpful if limb icing is done the first night.

Your pet will be given the most advanced pain control techniques currently available and may include a narcotic drip during surgery, an epidural (spinal) injection, a long acting local anesthetic at the surgical site as well as limb icing and oral pain meds. While these medicines greatly reduce any pain your pet may feel, they will likely still experience some discomfort. Signs of discomfort include panting, lack of appetite and an unwillingness to move around. You may be instructed to use ice packs or an icing machine to reduce pain and swelling. This is an incredibly important part of our pain program and is vital for rapid healing. You can use pill pockets to help give oral meds.

If your pet has had an epidural, they will likely experience urinary incontinence for 18-20 hours after surgery. The epidural also causes rear limb weakness so your pet will be unable to get up and urinate normally or move to a dry part of the bed. Plan on having plenty of potty pads or dry towels on hand during that first night at home. It's also helpful to use towel sling support under the abdomen to help your pet out the following morning.

### **Build a comfortable space for your dog's recovery.**

Once home, your pet may still be feeling groggy from the anesthesia so make sure to guide them gently to the area you have created for them. They will appreciate you sitting close by. A blanket can help to keep them warm and secure as they settle.

As the days pass you may be able to let them spend more time in the blocked off area that you have set up. Make sure their space is in an area that keeps them in a social setting but with little household traffic.

Cuddle and spend some extra time with them. Just as humans like to feel comforted and taken care of during recovery, your pet will appreciate the extra TLC as well.

## **Restrict the amount of activity after surgery.**

Limit the amount of activity. At first, walks should be given only for bathroom use.

Use a short leash (no retractable leashes) when you and your pet go out, even if you are in your yard. Letting them roam freely can increase their chances of post-surgical complications.

Avoid stairs as best as you can. Setting up your pet's post-surgery space on the first floor is ideal. Any stairs that your pet may have access to should be blocked off.

Do not play with your pet as you would normally. Instead, you can offer your pet a Kong or new chew toy to help occupy their mind while healing. Puzzle toys are also a great option.

After orthopedic surgery, your pets' body will need time to heal before normal activity can be resumed. Our pets are like kids and want to go run and play as soon as they feel better. While a repaired limb may be better initially, overactivity can cause severe pain and even destroy the costly repair that was just completed. You will need to restrict activity to a very small yard or inside the house and **ABSOLUTELY** no running or flights of stairs until released by your veterinarian. Plan on about **FOUR MONTHS** of controlled activity to be safe.

## **Follow post-op directions from your surgeon.**

Make sure to provide the full-course medication prescribed and that your pet does not spit it out. Understand the side effects of the specific medication prescribed to your pet, as some medication may keep your pet in a sedated state.

Keep your Elizabethan collar (e-collar) or dog cone substitute on your pet to keep them from licking or chewing at the bandage or incision site. Leaving your pet unattended without their collar is not recommended.

If your pet is returning home the same day from being under anesthesia, it is best to offer a smaller meal at first. Loss of appetite and nausea are common after anesthesia.

Monitor your pet's bandage to make sure it stays dry, clean, and odorless. Monitor the position as well, so the surgical site is not exposed.

Depending on the surgery, breed, and age of your pet, they may need assistance with walking. There are lots of slings specifically made to assist pets with walking that you can purchase. However, in a pinch, you can wrap a towel, or cloth, under their waist to help hold up their weight.

Be sure to go to all follow-up visits with your veterinarian. During these visits, they will check the bandage, incision, and potentially take radiographs to monitor any shift in the plates and screws from any excessive movement.

You may be asked by your veterinarian to apply cold or hot packs on the surgery site while they heal.

### **Prolong the health of your dog after surgery.**

Rehabilitation may be needed after and during the healing process. Once your veterinarian has given the green light, you can introduce approved activities such as light walks, simple command exercises (repetition sequence of sit, lay down, stay). Depending on the surgery, more advanced rehab, such as water or laser therapies, may be recommended.

Your pet will likely be referred to a Certified Rehabilitation Nurse here at AAWC to assist during the healing phase. Rehabilitation is an incredibly important part of your pets recovery and will ensure the best outcome possible.

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