7 Steps to Optimise Recovery for Your Dog After Cruciate Ligament Injury or Surgery

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DOGS IN MOTION
Canine Rehabilitation

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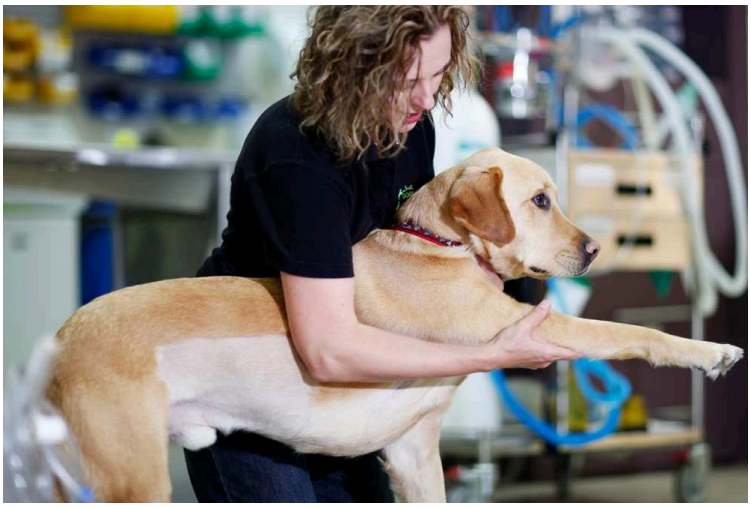
Welcome

Over the past 14 years as an Animal Physiotherapist, I've helped thousands and thousands of owners and their dogs to recover following cruciate ligament injury or surgery, and helped them get back to doing the activities they love together.

But I've also seen many dogs who did not have successful outcomes. Mostly because their owners didn't know how to care for them at home or how to help them recover and return to regular exercise.

If you're a dog lover like me, then watching your dog experience a cruciate injury or surgery can be very overwhelming. It is one thing to discuss recovery in the clinic, but quite another to arrive back at home with your dog and to know how to care for them. One day you have a happy healthy dog, the next you have a patient who needs extensive care and rehabilitation.



Your life is turned upside down. You have to watch your animal suffering and in pain, your whole life is interrupted: you cant go to the dog park together or to the local café, can you even go to work and leave them alone? You want to give them every chance to get back to being the dog you know and love, but you often don't know where to start.

At Dogs In Motion, we provide rehabilitation for VIP pets and their dedicated owners. We understand the bond you share with your dog, how much a part of your life they are and what it means for you to get you and your dog back to doing the things you love together.

Its not enough to just do the surgery or the vet treatment. Your dog's leg cant return to normal without specific structured rehabilitation. They may look like they are functioning normally, but they can shift the load around to other limbs and put extra pressure on the spine. This can lead to problems in these other areas now taking the increased load – even leading to rupture of the other cranial cruciate ligament.

This 7 step guide will outline all of the information you need in order to set up your home and the surrounding environment appropriately.

This 7 step guide is a great supplement to therapy at our clinic : Call (03) 9553 0896 for appointments.

If you are unable to visit our clinic, the '**16 Week Online Canine Cruciate Recovery Program**' is a must.
You can sign up to this self paced, week by week program at dogsinmotion.com.au

At our Dogs In Motion Canine Rehabilitation Clinic, our rehabilitation programs speed recovery after cruciate ligament surgery, with proven results, backed up by scientific evidence.

Our patients go through a thorough assessment with an Animal Physiotherapist, after which we decide together as therapist and owner on a treatment plan that suits your dog's individual needs.

We then commence treatment for your dog to reduce pain, start to improve weight bearing and strengthen muscle. We provide you with a customised home exercise program and offer state of the art underwater treadmill, which accelerates and maximises muscle growth.

We help your dog rehabilitate all the way back to the park!

Step 1: Set Up Your Home

Your home is the most safe and protected place for your dog, but when he or she is in recovery mode, there can be many aspects of your home environment that can put them at risk.

Confining:
For the majority of their day, your dog needs to be kept in a much smaller area than they may be used to. This is so that the amount of loading and moving they are doing on their joint is minimised, therefore giving the joint an opportunity to heal.
A crate that is the right size for your dog can be the best solution, particularly if your dog is likely to jump over a pen or barrier. Confining your dog to one particular room of the house can be another good option. Pens, or circular fences, can be great for dogs that won't be tempted to jump out.
You will need to be able to get your dog outside for toileting and fresh air and walks, so consider how your dog will access this space safely. If your dog is an outside dog and never comes inside, you will need to fence off a smaller section so that your dog won't be tempted to run around.

Flooring:
Do you have tiles or floorboards at home that are slippery for your dog? Slipping and sliding can put tremendous pressure on a recovering joint, so put down some non-slip matting in the areas that your dog will be walking. A simple solution can be yoga mats, off-cuts or off cuts of carpet. Your dog will need to have non slip flooring ideally, long term – to prevent further injury - so adding carpet runners to large areas will give your pet a safe pathway to travel.
If you can confine your dog to a carpeted area of the house, this can be a great solution also.
You can also try non slip boots for your dog if you are reluctant to change your décor, but make sure you have trialed the boots and that they will stay on.

Step 2: Get Equipped

There a few key pieces of equipment that will make your rehabilitation journey much easier. For some items, a chat with your animal physiotherapist can help you determine if they are necessary for your dog.

Ramp:
A ramp can be of great assistance to get your dog in and out of a car safely, and also up and down steps. Consider the decreased load placed on your own back if your dog can perform these transfers without being lifted.

Harnesses:
A rear harness can be a great tool to allow you to offload your dogs recovering limb while they walk. If your dog needs to move through the house or get into the car, the harness can ensure this is performed more safely. A towel looped under your dogs belly can be a suitable substitute to a harness if required. We use and recommend the 'Help 'em up Harness'.

Ice and heat packs:
In the first few weeks of recovery, the rehabilitation goal is to reduce swelling, pain and inflammation in your dog's limb. An ice pack is a fantastic way to do this. In the later stages of recovery, when the focus is to get the muscles moving effectively once again, a heat pack can be very helpful. If you obtain a pack that can be used for both icing and heating, it will get frequent use over the full recovery journey.

Bedding:
It is important to ensure that your dog will be able to get on and off their bed safely. Elevated beds, very puffy beds, or beds with high sides, may need to be replaced by flatter matting for the first few weeks. A firm supportive mattress will also provide comfort while they are recuperating and support the body and joints long term.
We use and recommend the 'Henry Hottie Beds'
If your dog has issues with incontinence, then you will need to ensure that the bedding has appropriate pads in place.

Prams and Wheelchairs:
Placing your dog in a pram can be a great way for your dog to continue to enjoy the great outdoors, while still protecting the recovering joint. If you are keen to continue to walk or run regularly, or have another dog that still needs their regular exercise, the pram can be a win-win for you both.
Canine Wheelchairs, where a set of wheels is attached to your dog to enable continued locomotion without the use of the back legs, can be a great option for dogs looking at a longer term recovery, and should be discussed with your rehabilitation team.

Proprioception Equipment:
As your dog recovers, he or she will need to re-train their body's ability to move, balance and respond quickly to the environment. This is known as proprioception. There are many pieces of equipment that make it more easy and fun for dogs to retrain their proprioception, such as air filled discs, air mattresses and balance balls. Use of any of these should only be prescribed by an animal physiotherapist or canine rehabilitation therapist as there is a potential for re-injury or actually slowing recovery if incorrect exercises are chosen.

Step 3: Pain Management

A real key for a speedy and successful recovery from cruciate injury or surgery is adequate control of pain, swelling and inflammation throughout the recovery process.

If these three factors are not managed well, muscle activation in your dog's affected limb will be impaired, and their rehabilitation is likely to be slow or incomplete.
As dogs don't easily let us know when they are in pain, it is important to avoid things that can cause it, and to use techniques known to reduce it.

Activity reduction:
If your dog is doing too much moving around, this can cause increased pain, so ensure they are adequately restricted by confining them, ensuring non slip surfaces and walking them with harness support if needed.

Medications:
One week of anti-inflammatories is not enough! Talk to your vet about adequate medication over the full course of rehabilitation

Icing:
This is a very cheap and easy way to manage pain, swelling and inflammation, particularly in the first few weeks.

Acupuncture:
Just like in humans, acupuncture can be a great way to manage pain in dogs.

Step 4: Brain Stimulation

The containment required to allow adequate healing and recovery after cruciate injury or surgery can often last up to twelve weeks. This can cause excessive boredom in dogs, which can lead to destructive behaviors.

It doesn't have to be that way, however, if you put some simple measures in place to keep your dog curious and entertained.

Food:
Break up your dog's daily food quota and use it in a variety of food releasing toys, such as treat balls or puzzles for dogs. Fresh raw bones, where suitable, can be another great and cost effective way to entertain your dog.

Location:
Ensure that your dog's crate is in a central part of the house with activity going on around them. This is far more interesting than the stimulation 'black hole' of being segregated and left alone. If no one is home during the day, it is a great idea to get a trusted pet sitter or dog walker to visit your home daily to interact with and entertain your dog to break up the day. Just make sure they are aware of the restrictions your dog is under at each stage of their recovery.

Pram:
Sights and smells are a huge source of enjoyment and stimulation for dogs, so take your dog out for a 'rolling walk' in a pram. Once your dog is able to walk outside for short periods, a pram can help to extend the outing into a longer walk for you both.

Games:
There are many varied dog games available for sale, and these can be a great way to entertain your dog. Often they involve treat rewards. Just ensure that playing the game does not breach your dog's physical restrictions.

Scenting:
Spend some time with your dog creating scenting challenges. Hide treats under various boxes, in a controlled space, and make sniffing out the treats more challenging if they are successful. This is a great way to spend time bonding and having fun with your dog, while still adhering to exercise restriction instructions.

Step 5: Nutrition and Supplementation

Just like in humans, nutrition plays a key role in health and recovery for dogs. It is important that your dog is fed the best quality food that you can afford, always ensuring that their diet is well balanced and with an adequate amount of protein, which is essential for turnover of new cells.

With so many options out there, it can be a little confusing when you are trying to choose a food for your pet.
If you choose to feed a commercial food, feed the most expensive one you can afford – preferably Australian made. If you feed raw food or prepare your pet's meal at home, make sure you do your homework and research how to prepare a balanced meal. Make sure you feed a wide variety of foods. Try to feed human grade products if with no hormones, pesticides and additives. These are known to contribute to many diseases in people so why would we feed them to our pets?
It is important NOT to decrease your dog's food intake, particularly in the first month post surgery. It is well known that the nutritional needs of the body *increase* as they are trying to heal. If we reduce their intake we can actually contribute to delayed wound healing and recovery of muscle tissue. Yes we need to be careful of weight gain with reduced exercise, but in the initial period after injury or surgery, healing and recovery are actually more important.

Supplements:
While in recovery mode, it is crucial that your dog is getting all of the essential micronutrients required for not only maintenance of good health, but for for acceleration of healing. In conjunction with a good diet, we recommend and use 'Wellbeing Essentials for Dogs' which contains 20 natural fresh wholefoods and super-foods. It's packed with vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, essential fatty acids, phytonutrients and pre and probiotics, all from premium human food ingredients.
Additional supplements for joint health are also recommended for any dog with a joint injury or surgery. Green lipped mussel has been shown to reduce inflammation and improve joint health and is a good lifelong addition to your dogs diet.
Cartrophen Vet is an injection based supplement used to treat arthritic joints in dogs, and is something that can be helpful in cruciate recovery. Discuss your pet's needs with your vet.

Weight Control:
Your dog will be a lot less active than normal while rehabilitating. Remember NOT to reduce their calories in the first month at least as they need adequate nutrition for healing. After this time, then reaching a balance of intake for their exercise level, to help them achieve ideal weight is important. Dogs that are overweight will have significantly more joint pain and reduced mobility compared with their skinnier friends.

Step 6: Exercise and Therapy

Following cruciate injury or surgery, your dog's muscles lose strength and function, and this simply does not return to normal without a specific and structured rehabilitation program.

Passive range of motion and a controlled walking program are NOT a suitable complete rehabilitation program, though this is what is commonly prescribed to many dogs after injury or surgery.

Running and jumping activities must be eliminated for the first 8 to 12 weeks of recovery, and after this time these activities must be reintroduced gradually and progressively. This return to activity can take anywhere from 4 weeks to 6 months, and should ideally be guided by an experienced animal Physiotherapist or canine rehabilitation therapist.

Even once the rehabilitation phase is considered to be complete, some ongoing restrictions should be put in place as the joint will never return completely to a 'normal' state.

These recommended ongoing restrictions include:

- No ball chasing (or at least reduce the duration and intensity of ball play to just a few small throws)
- No Frisbee
- Avoid rough play with other dogs

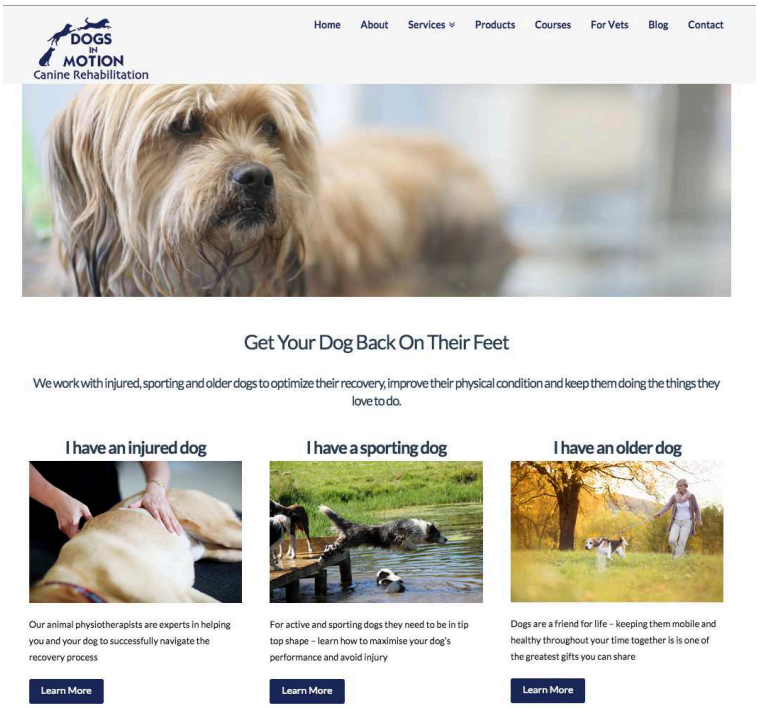
Step 7: Your Team

Your team should consist of you and your dog, your vet, and your rehabilitation providers, such as an animal Physiotherapist and animal Hydrotherapist.

All members of the team should communicate openly to achieve the best result for your dog...and get you back to doing what you love.

Watching your dog go through cruciate injury or surgery can often cause you to feel fear, anguish, guilt and devastation. Hopefully this guide has helped to alleviate these feelings by putting you back in control of your dog's recovery.

What to do now:
The best rehabilitation guidance for you and you dog is with an experienced Animal Physiotherapist. At Dogs In Motion Canine Rehabilitation we are experts in this recovery process. We have helped thousands and thousands of dogs to recover following cruciate injury and surgery. Our rehabilitation methods are proven, and back up by scientific research. **Call (03) 9553 0896** to make an appointment or to discuss your dog's needs.



If you have difficulty accessing an Animal Physiotherapist, or you wish to supplement your therapy, visit www.dogsinmotion.com.au/dog-courses for information about the **Online Canine Cruciate Recovery Accelerator Course**. This is the world's leading resource in guiding owners through the staged rehabilitation exercises that should be performed each week, for the initial 3 months of their dog's recovery from cruciate injury or surgery.

We wish your dog a speedy and successful recovery.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Monk finds her passion at the intersection between helping people and helping animals. She is driven to assist pet owners to help their own dogs, through the provision of compassionate rehabilitation services, helping to strengthen the bond between owner and pet, whilst maximising quality and longevity of life.

Michelle started out as a human physiotherapist and loved helping humans to heal, but something was still missing. The time spent outside of work hours, with her fur kids and human family was most fulfilling. This lead her on a journey to combine these 2 loves into a successful career that has spanned over 14 years.
Michelle now works exclusively as a physiotherapist with animals – mostly pet dogs.
She started the first rehabilitation centre for dogs in Australia in 2002, complete with indoor heated pool and rehabilitation gym. In 2003 she designed and had built, the first underwater treadmill for dogs in Australia, and a second one in 2004.

Wanting to increase her knowledge, Michelle completed a Master of Animal Physiotherapy at the University of Queensland in 2004, winning the Deans commendation award for academic excellence. Her research paper on rehabilitation after cruciate surgery was published in the prestigious American Journal of Veterinary Research.

Michelle has delivered many lectures and courses on animal physiotherapy and rehabilitation, both throughout Australia and internationally. She has authored the hydrotherapy chapter in the Australian textbook: Animal Physiotherapy: Assessment, Treatment and Rehabilitation of Animals, which was first published in 2007.
Michelle won the ‘Best Specialist Provider of the Year’ at the Australian Master Dog Breeders Association awards in 2011 and 2015

Michelle is passionate about the ongoing development of the profession and is at the forefront of new treatment ideas and modalities.
While she treats canine patients with a wide variety of conditions, she has special interest in the application of prosthetics and orthotics to animals. She developed a partnership with the world leaders in Veterinary Orthotics and Prosthetics – ‘OrthoPets’ and is the Victorian Distributor for this company. She has now provided custom quality orthotics and prosthetics to over 250 Australian pets since 2009.

Michelle is passionate about making rehabilitation accessible to all pets, so that she can help as many pets and owners as possible, enjoy long fulfilling lives together.

Visit www.dogsinmotion.com.au