



Post-operative care for patients after spinal surgery

Medication:	Antibiotics:	We usually dispense antibiotics like claviseptin (tablets given twice daily).
	Anti-inflammatories:	We usually dispense carprofen (tablets given twice daily), or meloxicam (a liquid given once daily). These are given with food. They occasionally cause vomiting or diarrhoea, in which case prompt advice should be sought.
	Analgesics:	We may dispense tramadol to dogs, (tablets given twice daily). For cats we often dispense buprenorphine (given every 8 hours by mouth).

At least two discrete puddles of urine should be passed daily. As your pet is not walking normally it can be hard to tell if they are really aware that they are urinating. Without voluntary control over urination, the bladder continues to fill and overflows with the pressure. A constant trickle or dribble of urine doesn't mean that the bladder is being emptied properly. It can just be the bladder overflowing. Prolonged over-filling can permanently damage the bladder. It would be unusual for an animal to be discharged without voluntary urinary control. This would never happen unless we had given special instructions for either managing an in-dwelling urinary catheter, or else for a vet to check the bladder once or twice daily.

Rechecks a few days after discharge may be with your own vet to save un-necessary travelling. We can do this check-up if travelling is not an issue, and all check-ups with us are free of charge under our "fixed price" schemes. Please contact us to book an appointment for us to see the case back 2-3 weeks post-operatively when we can remove sutures/staples and check that all is going to plan.

Dogs and cats should have as many short periods of assisted walking exercise as possible, and at least several each day. A harness can be used to support the fore quarters and/or a sling can be used to support the hind quarters during assisted walking. Use forgiving surfaces for the assisted walking to reduce the risk of damage in the event of stumbling. Encourage efforts to walk with praise. Don't carry your pet everywhere! Beware of the edges of concrete slab steps which can easily traumatise legs. Use ramps or pad the sharp edges. When pets are unsupervised, restrict activity to prevent injury that might result from uncoordinated activity. This may mean confinement to a cage. Consider using stair gates.

A pet that is spending most of its time lying around is at risk of developing pressure sores which are much better prevented than treated. The elbows, pelvis and ankles are most at risk. Alternate the side that the pet lies on every couple of hours. Prop them on their tummies with rolled towels. Seek prompt advice if any area looks sore. Use soft bedding and keep your pet clean and dry. Urine scalding can be a major cause of skin soreness. Bathe soiled areas (avoiding wounds) and blot dry without rubbing.

Passive joint flexion/extension for a few minutes, repeated every few hours, helps maintain flexibility and motion.

Hydrotherapy and swimming can help maintain joint motion and muscle mass, and exercise is possible before body weight can be supported. But hydrotherapy is delayed until 3 weeks post-operatively when the wound can stand immersion. We only recommend the use of a hydrotherapy centre that is approved by the Canine Hydrotherapy Association. Small pets can be allowed to swim in the bath so long as they are SUPERVISED AT ALL TIMES. Fill the bathtub with lukewarm water so the pet is just out of its depth. Support the pet under the chest, but not so much that they don't try to swim! After a few minutes drain out some water so that the feet touch the bottom (a non-slip mat on the floor of the bath-tub helps grip). Water still supports the body weight. Allow them to walk around like this for a few minutes more. As their strength improves, drain the bath more and more so that they gradually bear more and more weight. Swimming also helps keep the pet clean but drying afterwards must be thorough (see "pressure sores", above)

The prognosis and the convalescent period depend on many factors: how badly was the spinal cord injured before the surgery? Was surgery delayed? How effective is the rehabilitation? What level of function is required of the pet? Clearly the level of function that is required of a pet Daschund is less than that required of a working Spaniel. Recovery can continue over many weeks so be patient and be prepared for an emotional "rollercoaster" with prolonged uncertainty be prepared for the frustration of waiting anxiously for improvement. Watching a spinal case recover is a bit like waiting for a kettle to boil – it seems to take forever! See our separate information sheet on spinal surgery for further information.

Complications

Infection – this is uncommon, but it does occasionally happen. If ooze is evident from wounds, seek prompt advice.

For further advice please contact us by phone on 07944 105501 or at mail@wm-referrals.com