



SPINAL SURGERY LONG-TERM RECOVERY GUIDE



Now that your pet has finished the first month of strict rest after their surgery, it's time to start building up their activity again. This needs to be gradual, as they are still recovering from a serious injury and operation.

Use this guide to help you, although specific recommendations might be offered on a case-by-case basis.

Rest

The stricter period of rest should be over now as we have allowed some time for the tissues to heal. Neurological healing will continue for longer, as it can take months to show its full recovery.

We recommend leaving the crate available in the room if your pet is used to staying in it and is calm. They can be in the room, preferably with no slippery flooring, or a mat/rug. When unsupervised and at nighttime, we would recommend that they stay in their crate to prevent injuries.

As best as you can, continue to avoid jumping, running and stairs for a further 2 weeks.

Once these 2 weeks are over, they can be allowed to roam freely in your house.

Exercise-play

Now is time to gradually build up exercise. After the initial crate rest, you can start taking them for slightly longer walks, with support as needed. If they are able to walk without assistance, we still recommend the use of a chest harness and lead so you can control how they walk with you.

After the first 4 weeks, you should increase the walks for 5-10 minutes each week, always on lead, for a further 4 weeks.

Two months after surgery, if your pet has no signs of pain or weakness, you can choose to walk them off lead and allow them to run if they wish.

Particularly for neck surgery, you should avoid any pulling/tugging in the neck.

During their recovery, they can have some soft toys and lick mats/toys in the crate with them, and now you can reintroduce other toys they like. Chasing the ball should be reintroduced no sooner than 8 weeks after the operation.

Physiotherapy and hydrotherapy

These can be beneficial to enhance recovery of movement and coordination. If you wish to take your pet to a centre, please check with your vet that they have certified professionals.

Neurological recovery

The nervous system is delicate and resilient at the same time. Sudden injuries like intervertebral disc extrusions cause swelling on top of the compression. This damage can take a long time to show its full recovery, even over months.

We tend to see a more dramatic improvement in the first 2 months after the operation, but we want to see a gradual improvement beyond this time.

Sometimes recovery is not full, and your pet might not return to 100%. In most cases, the degree of deficit remaining doesn't impact their day-to-day life. Some weakness and/or incoordination can be noted to remain forever.

At this stage, if your pet doesn't have another condition, they should be comfortable without medications.

When to call your vets

Intervertebral disc disease is a common problem in dogs, and sadly it can relapse.

Signs of relapse might resemble the first episode, with varying degrees of back/neck pain and inability to use the limbs.

Within the first month of recovery these signs can be related to the initial injury (same disc), and beyond the first month it is more likely that a different disc, or a different problem has developed.

If you find that your pet is sore and/or they become weaker in their limbs you should contact your vet as soon as possible.

Some dog breeds (like Dachshunds) are more prone to develop disc herniations than other breeds, and the relapse rate can be as high as 30%. In French Bulldogs, the relapse rate has been reported to be about 50%.

Long-term recommendations

There is no evidence that keeping your pet on restricted exercise will prevent a further event of disc herniation, therefore once recovered from the initial injury and surgery they should be able to have a normal life.

We recommend keeping them in a lean body condition, or ideal body condition score. This generally means that you should be able to see their waist from above and feel the ribcage easily if you pet them.

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