

Post - Operative Elbow Protocol

Week 1

- Take all medications as prescribed by your veterinarian.
- Icing the joint. Try for 10 minutes, twice a day if possible, but if someone were home with the dog, then continual replenished ice bags would be useful. If you do not have an icepack, you can use a bag of frozen peas / corn, or make one by placing equal parts of water and alcohol in a Ziploc bag and freeze. If you are using a plastic icepack, be sure to protect the skin with a damp cloth so that the plastic does not stick to the skin.
- Range of Motion (ROM): Bend and straighten the elbow within the dog's tolerance. You just want to move the joint, but you are not concerned with getting full ROM. Repeat 10 times, twice a day (or more often if able).
- Toe squeezes / tickling: Grasp your dog's toes on the surgical leg and wiggle / pull on them. This should make your dog try to pull its leg away from your hand. Let him/her do this. Repeat 10 times, twice a day.
- Joint compressions: With the elbow bent at 90 degrees, place one hand under the elbow and your other hand up at the shoulder joint. Compress the joint by moving your hands together. The movement is next to nothing, but it will help with swelling and pain at the joint
- Walking should be out for elimination only, however if your dog is interested in sniffing around (ON LEASH) for 5 minutes, that would be allowable.
- Confinement to a crate, small pen, or small quiet room when you are not at home. You may need to also utilize a cone / Elizabethan collar to prevent licking at the incision and stitches.
- Do not allow any running, jumping, or playing for the duration of the rehab period (typically 6 - 8 weeks).
- If you have slippery floors, it is recommended that you create a pathway for your dog to walk by laying down inexpensive rubber-backed mats.
- Considerations to think about (if they have not already been discussed) would be long-term joint nutraceutical supplementation (i.e. glucosamine, MSM, fatty acids, etc) to help slow down the onset of arthritis.
- THERAPY
 - Therapy may include modalities for pain relief and swelling reduction.
 - Massage may be utilized for swelling control
 - Acupuncture might also be useful.
 - Instruction and guidance in the aforementioned home therapies.
 - Also, a therapist can monitor the incision and appropriate healing of the surgical joint.

Weeks 2 & 3

- If there is still swelling in the joint, then continue with icing, joint compressions, ROM, and toe squeezes.
 - You are able to increase the amount of pressure you apply to the ROM. Discomfort with the ROM is okay, but there should never be pain.
 - You can also resist the bending of the dog's leg when you do the toe squeezes (hang onto the toe as the dog pulls away).
- Leash walking can be increased by a minute every two days. Steep hills are not advised at this stage.
 - To increase weight bearing on the surgical leg, you can use a bootie, sock, plastic bag, or 'hair elastic' around the non-affected front foot / wrist.
- Tricks to increase weight bearing on the surgical leg:
 - In standing, entice your dog to follow a treat from side to side.
 - Lure your dog to walk in a circle (with the surgical leg on the inside of the circle).
- Stretches
 - Shoulder extension stretch: With one hand, cup the back of your dog's elbow and use this point as leverage to push your dog's leg forward and up towards its head. You can do this with the dog in any position. Stretch to discomfort but not pain. Hold the stretch for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
 - Biceps stretch: Start by moving the leg so that you are aiming the 'point' of the dog's elbow up towards his/her spine. Now place one hand on the point of the elbow and the other on the forearm and attempt to straighten the elbow. Stretch to discomfort but not pain. Hold the stretch for 20 seconds. Repeat 3 times.
- If an underwater treadmill is available for use, it can be utilized as soon as the incision is healed.
- THERAPY
 - Modalities for pain, swelling, healing, and cartilage health
 - Acupuncture could be beneficial still
 - Electrical stimulation with exercise (to begin the rebuilding process)
 - Therapeutic exercises could be started in-clinic in order to prescribe those most appropriate for home use.

Weeks 4 to 6

- Leash walking can be progressed to longer and longer time frames, so long as your dog is not limping after the walk.
 - Steeper hills could be tried at this point.
 - Uneven terrain could be navigated as well.
- Exercises to encourage use, build strength, and enhance proprioception
 - Obstacle course: Create an obstacle course for your dog to walk through / over. This could include a mop handle, a broom handle, a row of dirty laundry, a row of soup cans, or the vacuum hose! Walk your dog back and forth over these objects several times.
 - Weave poles: With a treat, lure your dog in and out of a line up of obstacles (i.e. pylons, deck chairs, etc). Go back and forth several times.
 - Serpentine walking back and forth up and down a curb along the street.
 - Tug of war can be a good strengthening exercise.

- 3-Leg balancing: When standing on a stable surface, lift the dog's 'good' front leg off the ground and have the dog balance for 5 – 20 or more seconds (as able). Rest and repeat 10 times
- Diagonal-Leg balancing: If able to do the exercise above with ease, increase the difficulty by lifting the 'good' front leg and it's opposite hind leg off the ground. Hold for 5 – 20 seconds (as able). Repeat x 10.
- Jumping UP onto a platform. Entice or encourage your dog to jump up onto a platform (of about his / her own height). You will need to lift your dog back down to the ground (or provide a ramp). Repeat 5 – 10 times.
- Slow walking down stairs. On leash, walk your dog up and down the stairs in your home. You want the dog to go slowly and use both legs independently.
- THERAPY
 - Therapeutic exercise is the cornerstone of this phase. The therapist may trial exercises in-clinic and prescribe those most suitable.
 - A short session with modalities could help with joint health also.

Weeks 7 and beyond

- Exercises to encourage advanced body awareness and higher levels of strength
 - Shuttle runs: Run with your dog, or throw a toy from side to side to encourage your dog to do a short sprint and then change direction to go the other direction. Do this in a confined area with good footing (i.e. your back yard or a carpeted room in your house).
 - Short retrieves: If your dog is willing to retrieve things, then start to throw object for him or her to fetch. To start you should throw only about 10 feet.
 - Trotting: At this time, you could try adding a few 2 – 5 minute jogging intervals to your walks.
 - High stepping at a trot: If you are coordinated enough, set up a course of obstacles (like the ones described in weeks 4 to 6) for you and your dog to trot (and jog) over. Alternately, trotting in snow or shallow water, if the footing is good, could also be utilized.
 - Games of keep away or chase (in a confined area): Play keep away with your dog (i.e. either run back and forth with a toy that YOU keep away from your dog, or start with a game of tug-of-war and allow your dog to win the toy, then playfully chase him or her.) Be sure to also train a release word to signify that the game is over or that you are serious about wanting the toy back at the end and intervals within the game.
- When your dog can perform the exercises above without showing signs of lameness, then you can start to allow some time at the off leash park (or in your backyard with other household dogs).
 - You may want to start during non-peak hours at the dog park, or start with your dogs most 'boring' of friends to begin with.
 - You may want to start with a walk for your dog to be properly warmed up.
 - You will want to watch and limit any rough play as well as the overall time of the leash-free activity.
- Check with your therapist to see if he or she feels that your dog is ready to resume full activity.