

Post-operative Instructions: Femoral Head and Neck Excision (FHO)

Your pet has had the femoral head (i.e. the ball, of the ball & socket hip joint) removed, creating a “false” joint. This procedure is designed to eliminate hip pain associated with chronic hip arthritis and hip fractures. The remaining portion of the femur (i.e. thigh bone) is now flat where it meets the acetabulum (i.e. the socket, of the ball & socket hip joint). The body will lay down scar tissue to create a sling-effect in what used to be the hip joint; your pet will use this “false” joint with minimal or no pain. Strength and flexibility are important for the best results. Physical therapy is essential for achieving full range of motion of the hip. The majority of patients will show no obvious different use of the affected leg, and do not have long term restrictions on activity.

ACTIVITY RESTRICTION x 2 weeks

- Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe indoor location with no free access to stairs for the initial 24 hours following the procedure. Avoid any rigorous activity for 2 weeks. Short, leashed walks are fine.
- It may be several days before your pet defecates (poops) due to medications given related to the surgery.
- Your pet may be groggy for the first few days. He or she may whine or appear more anxious than usual; this may indicate pain/discomfort or side-effects of the medications. Please call your veterinarian for assistance with pain medications or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.
- Your pet should start touching his/her toe down within the first 2 weeks. Thereafter, leg use should steadily improve. If you notice a sudden deterioration or he/she stops using the leg at any time after surgery, please see your veterinarian for examination.

INCISION CARE

- A wound dressing may have been applied to the incision. It may be removed in 3 days if present. Remove it sooner if there is blood visible under the dressing (strike through).
- Please look at the incision once daily. It should be dry, slightly red along the margins, and slightly swollen/thick on the edges. Over several days, it should lose redness and swelling. *Problems to call your veterinarian about:*
 - a) gapping (the edges should be exactly touching); b) discharge (other than small amount of blood); c) swelling (other than slightly raised skin near edges). Some bruising is normal and will resolve in 5-7 days.
 - b) Swelling of the ankle past the incision is common, and will resolve in a few days.
- Do not allow your pet to lick or chew the incision as this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection. If necessary, please use an E-collar or Lick Sleeve if you must leave your pet unattended.

DIET

- Ideally, keep your pet on the thin side of normal his/her whole life. Any orthopedic condition can progress over time with excessive, wear & tear; carrying less body weight will relieve some of this stress from the hip (and other) joints. Good parameters to monitor body condition are:
 - 1) you should be able to feel the ribs and pelvic bones, but not see them;
 - 2) your pet should have an “hour glass” figure when viewed from above looking down; 3) your pet should have a tucked up belly when viewed from the side.

PROGRESS EXAMS

- Return to your veterinarian in 10-14 days for a progress exam. Skin healing and leg function will be evaluated, sutures will be removed, and any physical therapy questions will be addressed.
- Your pet should start using the operated leg more strongly each week. By 6 weeks, he/she should be 90% recovered. If he/she suddenly deteriorates or does not appear to be progressing well enough, please return to your veterinarian for re-evaluation.

PHYSICAL THERAPY REGIMEN (We can also recommend professional physical therapy assistance in the Twin Cities. Studies have shown that a formal program can decrease post-operative recovery time. Please let your veterinarian know if you are interested in a referral.) ***A video demonstration of dog exercises can be found on our website: www.clvsurgery.com under the “Post-Operative Care” section ***

- The recovery from this orthopedic surgery is quite different than other orthopedic surgeries. Following an initial 2 weeks of reduced activity, it is recommended that you actively encourage your pet to use the operated leg vigorously. The goal is to optimize the range of motion of the hip area; often extension of the hip (i.e. backward movement of the limb, like when your pet is standing on just the back legs) is the most difficult leg function to have fully return. Jumping & standing up, going up stairs, and running full stride will encourage this full extension of the hip.
- **Week 1-2 (Day 1-14): Icing:** Cooling the surgical area will reduce pain and swelling. Do this as often as possible the week following surgery- several times a day. Apply ice packs (wrapped in thin cloth once bandage is removed) to the incision area twice daily for 15 minutes. Baggies of frozen peas work well for this, or make an ice pack by freezing 2 parts isopropyl alcohol to one part water in a ziplock bag.)
- **You may do the ice first, then this exercise with heat, then ice afterwards again.**
Range of Motion (ROM) Exercise- Have your pet lie on his/her good side, or in a standing position on a non-slip surface. Grip the front of the thigh or knee with one hand and steady your pet's lower back or top of the pelvis with the other hand. Gently and slowly, extend the hip by pushing the thigh backward towards the tail end. Now, slowly flex the hip by holding the back of the knee or lower thigh towards the rib cage. Repeat this motion slowly and smoothly *10 times twice daily*. Flex and extend only to your pet's comfortable limit. Do not go to the point of creating pain or resentment. Following ROM, apply ice packs as described above.
- **Week 3-6 (Dogs): Sit/stand Exercise:** Have your pet repeatedly sit and stand for 15-20 repetitions twice daily. Use small treats to encourage participation.
- **Walking:** for 5 minutes twice daily; add 5 minutes each week until your pet is walking a normal pace at least 20 minutes twice daily and using the operated limb every step. Use small treats to encourage participation. Avoid walking locations that will result in uncontrolled activities, such as meeting other dogs, ice, etc. Use small treats to encourage participation.
- **Active exercise:** You may encourage romping, jumping and playing. Playing fetch, walking up and down stairs, taking your pet for long walks are all acceptable activities during the recovery period.
- **Massage:** Have your pet lie on his/her good side. Skin massage around the hip involves using your fingers loosely on the surface of the skin, applying enough pressure to move the skin relative to the underlying tissues. Muscle massage of the hip area and thigh involves deeper kneading and pushing of the muscles. Perform both types of massage for 10-15 minutes twice daily. Continue 2 weeks.
- Swimming is wonderful rehabilitation exercise when performed correctly. You may allow swimming after week 2. Do not over extend your pet; start with short excursions (5 minutes) and increase duration and frequency gradually.
- **Week 3-6 (Cats): Play/passive PT:** Use a toy or treat to encourage extension of back legs. Cats do their best PT when distracted and engaged in a task. Consider a laser pointer or suspended toy positioned just out of his/her reach. Encourage reaching towards this object as a fun activity for 5-10 minutes. Repeat twice daily.

LONG TERM LIFESTYLE

- A small number of pets will develop over-exuberant boney tissues at the “false” joint sight. This may interfere with pain-free hip movement. If lameness persists or develops after 8 weeks post-operatively, please have your pet evaluated by your veterinarian.
- For the majority of pets, this procedure results in a solid and highly functional limb. The occasional pet will have a visible gait abnormality related to the slightly shorter leg length and a hip with more looseness. Some pets (especially heavier/larger animals) have a hard time pushing off to jump up, for this reason as well. You may notice your pet’s stride dip lower on the operated side with weight bearing; this gait abnormality is usually pain-free and pets navigate daily life without difficulty.