

## Post-operative Information: Forelimb Amputation

Your pet has had his/her front leg surgically removed. This is a major surgery and you should expect your pet to need 2-3wks to fully adjust to the new circumstances. *During the healing time, your pet may experience neck pain or sudden twinges of pain. This will subside over these first few weeks. Use the pain medications liberally to support your pet during this time and do not expect or ask him/her to be active.* After the recovery and adjustment period, dogs generally do very well with their new 3-legged status and normal daily activities, although their agility and endurance will be reduced.

### ACTIVITY RESTRICTIONS x 4 weeks

- Please keep your pet in a comfortable, safe indoor location for the next 24 hours until he/she is very steady on his/her feet. Do not allow free access to stairs.
- Your pet may be groggy for the next 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 medication adjustments or return for exam and additional pain medications as needed.
- Use a sling under the chest/armpits if needed during the first 7-10 days to assist and prevent falling on slippery surfaces.
- Avoid any rigorous activity for 4 weeks. Short, leashed walks are fine.
- Monitor appetite and attitude. *If both do not steadily improve over the next 2-3 days*, please call your primary care veterinarian or return for progress evaluation and problem-solving.
- You can expect your pet to have a bowel movement within 5 days. Some animals take longer than others depending on when they last ate prior to surgery and when they started eating after surgery. It may be abnormal in color and consistency for 2-3 days. If you have any concerns, please speak with your primary care veterinarian.
- Please confirm that your pet has urinated within 24 hours of returning home. If he/she does not, or you notice any problems related to urination, please speak with your primary care veterinarian.

### INCISION CARE

- Please look at the incision on your pet's chest twice 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:
  - gapping (the edges should be exactly touching)
  - discharge (other than small amount of crusting)
  - swelling (other than slightly raised skin near edges).

Some bruising is normal and will resolve in 5-7 days.

- Do not allow your pet to lick or chew the incision. Pets tend to want to lick early in the healing period and this can compromise the incision and predispose to infection. If necessary, please use an E-collar if you must leave your pet unattended.
- It is not uncommon for a seroma to develop under the incision; this is a pocket of normal tissue fluids that develops in a high motion/loose tissue area such as the shoulder region after an amputation. If the swelling is smaller than a plum, please monitor. Warm compresses applied to the area will encourage the fluid to reabsorb more quickly (3-7 days.) If the seroma progressively enlarges, please have your veterinarian assess the problem.
- A bandage may have been applied to protect the incision and prevent seroma formation; if it slips out of place, please return for replacement. You may remove the bandage in 10-14 days.

#### PHYSICAL THERAPY REGIMEN

- *Week 1:* Apply ice packs (wrapped in thin cloth) to incision area as often as possible for 10-15 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. Continue 7 days to help with pain.

#### DIET

- Ideally, keep your pet on the thin side of normal his/her whole life. Any minor orthopedic condition can progress with arthritis over time with excessive wear & tear; carrying less body weight will relieve some of this stress on the joints of the remaining 3 limbs. 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

- Please return to your primary care veterinarian in 10-14 days for a progress exam. Skin healing will be evaluated, sutures (if present) will be removed, and any questions you have will be addressed.

#### LONG TERM LIFESTYLE

- The functional prognosis for dogs treated surgically with amputation is considered good. Following the 4 week recovery period, there are no recommended limitations to their lifestyle.