

How rehab can help your pet

There's a misconception that physical rehabilitation is only for critically injured pets. It actually helps many pets lead more comfortable lives. Here are answers to some of the questions you may have about physical rehabilitation for animals.

Q. Which pets can benefit?

Rehabilitation treatments improve quality of life for a variety of pets, including critically injured animals, aging pets who are in pain, and pets trying to avoid and recover from surgery—especially orthopedic

and neurologic cases. And a technician or assistant who's learned basic massage techniques may be able to help calm boarding pets.

Q. Which conditions are commonly treated with rehabilitation?

Rehabilitation is frequently used to treat acute and chronic orthopedic and neurologic conditions. Some specific examples include osteoarthritis, hip dysplasia, and recovery from a fracture or a ruptured cranial cruciate ligament.

Q. What are the most effective treatment methods?

Some veterinary practices use specific equipment to aid in treatment, but members of a well-trained veterinary team can do a lot with just their two hands. For example, massage increases blood flow and helps resolve muscle tension. Passive range of motion exercises help pets recover flexibility. Therapeutic exercises allow them to rebuild muscle mass and increase flexibility, core strength, and proprioception. When medically appropriate, applying cold packs to pets who've undergone surgery and heat packs to pets with muscle tension or spasms



provides relief. If you do this at home, make sure you communicate closely with your veterinary rehab team to make sure you're using the right technique to rotate the packs and you don't damage your pet's skin.

Q. What if I don't have the time or money for rehabilitation?

Keep in mind that rehab often reduces the need for anti-inflammatory or pain medications for your pet, which saves money in the long run. As for time, we'll teach you basic at-home techniques if you can't come into the practice as often as prescribed. Working with your pet on rehab exercises can even help the two of you develop a closer relationship!

Q. How soon will my pet feel better?

Be careful here: It's easy to let your pet do too much too soon. A dog that needs eight weeks of postoperative rehabilitation usually feels better by week three. But keep in mind that your pet won't be healed until more time has passed, and too much activity before then could damage the surgery site. Also, excessive strain might make the surgery unsuccessful, which could waste your well-spent money. Be sure to ask your veterinary team if you have any questions about the right activity level for your pet.

Adapted from information provided by Kathy Coffman, a certified canine rehabilitation technician (CCRT) and certified massage therapist (CMT) at Veterinary Orthopedic Sports Medicine Group in Annapolis Junction, Md.