

Total Hip Replacement (THR) Home Care Guidelines

Recovery App: rrvss.bp.vet

A total hip replacement (THR) surgery has been performed and successful recovery from surgery and return to function depends on the quality of home care. These instructions are guidelines required to achieve a successful recovery and to minimize complications.

IMPORTANT: Animals frequently feel better long before they are healed. Your dog does not understand the nature of their surgery, and will want to become very active shortly after the procedure is performed.

Restriction of activity is extremely important. The recovery period will last for **a minimum of the next 12 weeks.**

This means confinement to a crate/cage/small room, no jumping, no running, no stairs, and no playing with other dogs until recovery is well advanced. Block access to furniture and stairs and use rugs or mats on slippery floors. When taken outdoors to urinate or defecate, your dog **MUST** be on a short (<6 feet) leash. This degree of confinement must be continued for the entire recovery period (minimum of 8-12 weeks) except when performing the activities described for rehabilitation.

- Your dog can be inside, on carpeted surfaces, under your direct supervision. Running, jumping, bounding and playing are not allowed (if there are other dogs in the household, you will need to keep them separated).
- Your dog must be on a leash at all times when outside. Your dog should go for short walks on leash to their comfort level. Please see rehabilitation guidelines for the timeline.
- When not under direct supervision, your dog is to be confined.
- Car rides, except for to and from the veterinarian, are prohibited until your pet is seen for a recheck.

If at any time during recovery and healing a set-back or decrease in function is noted, contact your veterinarian. Excessive activity may result in re-injury and/or complications that jeopardize a successful outcome and could result in additional surgery that will lead to additional discomfort for your dog and additional cost to you.

Signs to contact us immediately:

- Sudden non-weight-bearing or refusal to walk
- Acute crying or pain with movement
- Noticeable shortening of the operated leg
- Sudden swelling or heat at the incision
- Fever or lethargy
- Drainage, odor, or gaping of incision

Weight management is important during the recovery period as your dog will be getting less exercise. Decrease your dog's caloric intake accordingly. If your dog is overweight or obese a successful weight management plan will be critically necessary for the long term success of the surgery and recovery. Please discuss feeding strategies and/or prescription weight management diets with your regular veterinarian.

Administer all medications exactly as directed. Do not give extra pain medications without approval. If antibiotics were prescribed, complete the full course of medications.

PROGNOSIS:

Prognosis depends on the severity of pre-existing osteoarthritis, chronicity of disease, muscle mass and conditioning, and the presence of concurrent orthopedic or neurologic conditions. In general, the prognosis for return to comfortable, near-normal limb function following total hip replacement is considered good to excellent. Most dogs bear weight within days of surgery, with progressive improvement over 8-12 weeks; full return to peak function is typically expected by 3-6 months. Structured rehabilitation significantly improves the rate, strength, and quality of recovery.

Potential complications associated with total hip replacement include but are not limited to infection (including antibiotic-resistant infection), luxation of the prosthesis, implant loosening or subsidence, femoral fracture, sciatic neuropraxia or nerve injury, seroma formation, delayed incisional healing, persistent lameness, and progression of disease in other joints. Complications may require additional diagnostics, medical management, or, in some cases, revision surgery and

may be associated with additional costs.

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER GOING HOME:

After total hip replacement surgery, most dogs begin toe-touching or partial weight-bearing within the first 24-72 hours. Many dogs will bear weight earlier than expected, but the limb may appear stiff and mechanically abnormal during the first week. It is common for dogs to intermittently hold the limb up when standing still during the first 1-2 weeks, even while using it when walking. Mild swelling and bruising around the incision and thigh are expected and should gradually improve within 10-14 days.

During the first 4 weeks, activity must remain strictly controlled to reduce the risk of hip luxation or implant complications. Improvement in strength and coordination is gradual. By 6-8 weeks, most dogs are consistently weight-bearing with only a mild residual lameness, and radiographs are obtained to assess implant position and bone healing. If healing and examination findings are appropriate, a gradual increase in activity is initiated between 8-12 weeks. Full strength, muscle mass, and peak function are typically achieved between 3-6 months following surgery.

Changes to defecation can be normal after surgery, and can include:

- Delays in bowel movements for a few days post-operatively
- Constipation from anesthesia and opiates given during the procedure
- Desiccated (dry looking) feces
- Painful anal region
- Difficulty posturing

If no bowel movements are made after approximately 5 days post-op, you can consider using a soft laxative (pumpkin or Metamucil or psyllium powder). **Please CALL US** for the appropriate dosing before giving this.

RECHECK SCHEDULE:

- **2 weeks (can be virtual):** Incision check, activity review, video of gait
- **4 weeks (can be virtual):** Progress check, adjust activity, gait evaluation
- **8 weeks (must be in person):** Orthopedic exam + sedated radiographs to evaluate implant and guide activity progression

REHABILITATION AT HOME:

Rehabilitation begins soon after your dog's surgery. Over the course of months your dog's activity will be allowed to gradually increase to build muscle mass, improve flexibility and enhance bone healing while minimizing complications. The degree of activity should progress with your pet remaining comfortable. Controlled, gradual increases in activity based on clinical and radiographic progress minimize complications and support long-term joint function. The primary goal is increasing duration and minimizing intensity so REMEMBER explosive activities such as running, jumping or playing with other dogs are not allowed during the critical first 8-12 weeks recovery following surgery.

Weeks 0-2 - Strict Protection

1. Short and Controlled Leash Walks: Perform for 5 minutes, 3-5 times/day on a flat surface.
 - At first, these walks should be for elimination purposes only. This should be at a very slow and controlled pace. If needed, use your support harness under the belly to support your pet's hind end, especially on slippery surfaces.
2. Cold Therapy: Perform as needed for comfort for the first few days.
 - You can apply cold therapy to the affected hip and over the incision. Commercial gel ice packs may be used or bags of frozen vegetables. Wrap ice packs in a light towel or pillowcase before applying to avoid excessive cold on your pet's sensitive skin.
3. **NO** running, jumping, playing, stairs, slippery floors, uneven terrain, hills, sand, slick floors, etc.
4. Your pet **must be confined** when not supervised.

Weeks 2-8 - Controlled Increase

NOTE: At 2 weeks your pet will need an incision check, activity review, and a gait evaluation.

1. Short and Controlled Leash Walks: Perform for 8-12 minutes, 3-4 times/day on a flat surface.
2. Cold Therapy: Discontinue.
3. **NO** running, jumping, playing, stairs, slippery floors, uneven terrain, hills, sand, slick floors, etc.
4. Your pet **must be confined** when not supervised.

Activity intensity should always be guided by how your dog tolerates walks and exercises without pain, limping, or swelling the next day. If you notice that your dog is more lame or painful, rest for a few days and return to the previous level of rehabilitation. Some dogs progress rapidly while others are slower to recover. Take your time and do not rush the healing process. Baby-steps are best to avoid complications!

Please do not hesitate to call with any additional questions or concerns. Thank you for allowing us to care for your dog.



Thank you for choosing Russian River Veterinary Surgical Service

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