

ANIMAL Physiotherapy Services

Physiotherapy for Muscular Conditions Information Sheet

For decades, physiotherapy has been routinely used in humans with muscular conditions; with the advent of formal training in animal physiotherapy, we are now able to offer the same science-based rehabilitation to our pets that we would expect for any other member of our family.

There are many kinds of muscular conditions both humans and pets can suffer, such as strains, contractures, trigger points, and many more, so this sheet will provide you with general information and you are welcome to contact us with questions specific to your pet's case. (Email Helen Nicholson on info@k9physio.com or phone (02) 4739 4557)

In all cases, physiotherapy for muscular conditions aims to normalise muscle tone, relieve pain, improve muscle length and strength, and maximise muscle control to help prevent re-injury. This requires a multifaceted approach, some of the aspects of which are explained below.



The body swells in response to injury or surgery and even small amounts of swelling in and around a joint inhibit or “switch off” the surrounding muscles, weakening them quickly and leaving the joint less protected from further injury. Swelling must therefore be managed promptly.

Likewise, pain can influence your muscle control – it's hard to move properly when it hurts! Pain management is a priority, including pain in other muscles, which may have been compensating for the original problem.



Scar tissue quickly develops in strained muscles and this tissue needs to be both strong and supple to allow the muscle to function correctly in future. Where the condition has required surgery, scar management is typically begun at suture removal.

Although we aren't aiming to become Olympic gymnasts, it is important that balance is regained between the length and strength of the muscles in the injured area and also throughout the body to ensure optimal comfort and function both now and as your pet grows older.



And it's one thing to have the right length and strength in your muscles, and another thing entirely to know when to make use of them! Injury prevention programs are therefore employed to maximise co-ordination, balance and correct biomechanics.

Where chronic or severe muscle spasm or pain are a problem, for example when a trigger point develops, we have training in the safe application of a number of electrotherapy machines to help gently relieve the symptoms. In severe cases, we can even work with the vet to perform physiotherapy techniques under strong sedation or even general anaesthetic, in order to maximise effectiveness without traumatising your pet with techniques that would cause pain if they were fully conscious.

But most importantly, the latest human research shows that patients can continue to have deficits in muscular control for at least 6 to 12 months after some injuries, and that these deficits actually occur in both legs, not just the injured side. This leaves the patient at increased risk of injuring the other leg, too. Researchers therefore recommend that even when patients appear to be doing well after injury, that they are rehabilitated properly through the correct progression of exercises to ensure optimum long-term success and to minimise the risk of further injury. But don't panic! Five or 10 minutes incorporated into your daily interactions with your pet (for example, some stretches for food rewards at dinner time, once or twice a week) will seem like a breeze compared to the hard work you now face. We promise to do everything we can to support you during this difficult time and wish your pet a speedy recovery.