

ANIMAL Physiotherapy Services

Physiotherapy for Orthopaedic Conditions Information Sheet

Animals can suffer from many of the same orthopaedic conditions that people can and referral to physiotherapy means your pet will receive the same standard of care that any other member of your family would receive in a human hospital.

For example, both humans and pets can injure their cruciate ligaments, have luxating patellae, develop arthritis, or have any other of a number of common or rare orthopaedic problems. We therefore develop individual programs for each pet, and this sheet aims to give you some general information about common aspects of orthopaedic physiotherapy. Please feel welcome to contact Helen Nicholson on info@k9physio.com or ph/fax 4739 4557 for more specific information for your pet's condition.

In general, orthopaedic conditions require a multifaceted treatment approach, with the aim of reducing pain; maximising comfortable range of motion; promoting repair of damaged tissue where possible; and improving balance, co-ordination and strength to maximise quality of life. Where pets have had surgery, we also aim to maximize the healing process and scar quality.



Research shows that reducing weight by 11-18% can significantly improve lameness, but it's hard to lose weight when it hurts to move! If required, we can help reduce weight through controlled exercise programs that address the physical restrictions of your pet. A typical cardio-vascular program may be inadequate to your pet's needs, as they may also require their joint-supporting muscles to be strengthened and their affected joints gently mobilised to increase their ability to comfortably exercise.

Correctly done, weight-bearing exercise also helps stimulate cartilage and joint nutrition. Many physiotherapy exercises therefore aim to improve the delivery of nutraceuticals, whilst protecting the joint from overload. We design exercises to increase the strength of the muscles that support the joints, improving the balance between these and the muscles that move the joints, which has been shown in people to reduce pain and improve function. Specific exercises to improve balance and co-ordination also help your pet learn when and how much to contract their muscles to help protect their joints from injury.



The appropriate use of warmth (e.g. for pain or spasm) or cold (e.g. for pain or swelling) can also be very beneficial to orthopaedic patients and we have been carefully trained in the safe, effective use of these modalities. Additionally, special machines such as TENS units or muscle stimulators can be safely employed to relieve pain or improve muscle strength.

Massage can be very beneficial to orthopaedic patients, but it must be done gently and to the right body parts. Properly done, it can relieve pain, improve circulation and prevent delayed onset muscle soreness after activity (that feeling of "muscles you never knew you had" which in turn leads to stiffness).



Additionally, physiotherapists are well trained in movement analysis and in suggesting alternate ways of performing tasks to reduce pain and strain for owner and pet alike. Sometimes an orthotic or aide can also be used to make movement more comfortable and safer.

Research shows that it is vital that physiotherapy is commenced as soon after diagnosis as possible, and that the exercises are performed correctly and frequently enough to have the desired effect. Depending on the severity of your pet's condition, you may need to initially do between one and three batches of physiotherapy "homework" a day to ensure the best possible results.

But most importantly, researchers recommend maintaining the improvements made by physiotherapy through once or twice-weekly exercises for the duration of the animal's life, but don't panic! Five or 10 minutes incorporated into your daily interactions with your pet (for example, some balance exercises for food rewards at dinner time) is usually all it takes, and you will therefore be given a "maintenance homework plan" to work on upon discharge from regular physiotherapy appointments.

Wishing your pet comfort and happiness.