



Lone Star Veterinary Surgical Services

Surgical Solutions for Your Loved Pets

Postoperative Care: Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy (TPLO)

Your pet has had a TPLO performed to correct instability in their stifle (knee) due to a torn Cranial Cruciate ligament. In general, we expect that your pet will return to near normal function (approximately 80%- 90% when compared to an unaffected rear limb). How well your pet will recover is determined by many factors. Some of the things that determine the how well your pet will recover include: the type of disease or injury that made this surgery necessary, the amount of rehabilitation you are able to provide post-operatively, the age and size of your pet, and how well you follow the post-operative restrictions. If excessive activity is allowed too soon following surgery, stabilization of the knee can be lost requiring additional surgery.

After surgery your pet must be kept confined and have restricted exercise for at least 8 weeks after surgery. Your dog should not be bathed until the skin sutures are removed. The incision should appear clean and dry, with skin edges well apposed and no redness or discharge from the site evident.

- Please have your pet wear an e-collar for 10-14 days to protect the skin incision.
- You will need to return to your doctor for suture removal in 10-14 days.
- A physical rehabilitation consult with a certified Rehabilitation Veterinarian is recommended.

We do require recheck x-rays 4 weeks and 8 weeks after surgery to ensure proper healing. Some cases may require another set at 12 weeks to confirm that the bone is fully healed.

Immediately 72 hours post-op:

Your pet needs your love and attention during this time. The surgery site needs time to heal as the inflammation subsides. Pain medication and mild sedation is encouraged to ensure the best comfort for your pet.

An ice pack (with a cloth in between the skin and the ice pack) can be applied to the knee 2-3 times daily for 10-15 mins. There should be no free access to stairs, jumping, running, or playing with other dogs/family members. They can be walked outside ON LEASH for 3-5 mins, 3-4x daily for toileting and “sniff breaks” only. Light massage to the muscles of the surgical leg and paw is beneficial during this time to help with fluid movement, swelling, and to prevent joint stiffness.



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Day 3 - 3 weeks postoperative:

The goal during this time is to reduce pain, minimize muscle atrophy, and encourage toe-touching.

- Passive range of motion and gentle flexion and extension to the joints of the operated limb for 10 reps 2-3 times daily. Only take each joint to a point of resistance, then hold in that position for 5 seconds. This should not be painful, and the range should increase as recovery progresses. DO NOT pull on the limb from the paw, think of a slow controlled bicycling motion while supporting the entire limb.
- Slow controlled leash walking for 5-15 mins, 2-3 times daily. Multiple short walks are more beneficial than a single long walk. Please ensure a walking surface with good traction and support your pet to prevent falling if needed. If your pet begins to appear weak (limb shaking) or tired, you should revert to the last distance/activity which it could tolerate without these symptoms and hold there for 1 week before once again trying to increase.
- “Cookie stretches” can be performed with your pet standing facing you. Using a small treat, have your pet follow the treat slowly, turning their head to each side and not moving their feet. Start with bringing the treat to the shoulder, then progress to the elbow, hip and back paws as your pet gets stronger. This should encourage slight weight shifting to the limbs without excessive force on the joints.

3 - 6 weeks postoperative:

The goal during this phase is consistent weight bearing

- Slow controlled leash walks can be continued, increasing the duration of the walk by 5 mins each week, working up to 20-30 mins 2-3 times daily. You can introduce walking in wide circles and a “figure-8” pattern during the walk to improve unilateral weight bearing. Again, if at any time your pet appears weak (limb shaking or disuse of the limb) or tired, you should revert to the last distance/activity which it could tolerate without these symptoms and hold there for 1 week before once again trying to increase the activity level again.
- After 4 weeks sit-to-stand exercise can be started at this time. This will help strengthen the hip and stifle muscles and work to improve the hind limbs range of motion actively. Have your pet sit in front of you for a few seconds then have your dog stand, take a step



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forward and then sit again. Start with 5 reps twice daily and increase the reps by 5 weekly. The goal at the end of 8 weeks will be for your pet to sit as squarely as possible, with their legs directly under them, but do not force it!

- If the 4-week x-rays show normal healing, then your pet may be confined to one room in the house when you are away. They may have free roam of the house when you are home (no stairs except to go upstairs to bed in the evening). If your pet is active and runs to the doorbell (and slips on the tile/linoleum) it needs to be confined to one room with good footing.

6 – 8 weeks postoperative:

- All of the above exercises can continue to be performed, slowly increasing in number of repetitions and times performed daily as your pet's strength increases.
- If the 8-week recheck x-rays show normal healing, then your pet may have free roam of the house and backyard. Any off-leash running, jumping, ball playing, etc. is still restricted at this time! Again, if your pet begins to appear weak (limb shaking) or tired, you should revert to the last distance/activity which it could tolerate without these symptoms and hold there for 1 week before once again trying to increase the activity level.
- Place 4-6 PVC/broom/mop handles on the ground far enough apart that your dog has a single step in between each bar (usually the distance is the length from the back of their shoulder blades to the top of their hips). Walk next to your dog and encourage them to walk over the poles with control. Perform 3-5 repetitions 1-2 times daily. This exercise can be progressed weekly by increasing the number of repetitions and raising the bar height gradually, but NEVER raise it to above your dog's wrist!!
- Slow and controlled stair climbing can be started as an exercise. Only use 5-10 stairs up and down 2-3 times daily. Please ensure good traction and support of your pet to prevent any potential slips or falls.

9 – 16 weeks postoperatively

Off-leash activity can be progressed by walking, trotting, jogging and ultimately running. No balls, frisbees, dog parks, or heavy activity is allowed for 6 months post-operatively. We recommend you avoid these types of heavy activity altogether, as there is a high percentage of



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dogs that will tear the cruciate ligament in the opposite leg (30% - most breeds, up to 50-60% in bull mastiffs, chows, akitas, etc.).

It will, on the average, take a minimum of 12 weeks for your pet to use the operated leg normally. During this period of rehabilitation, it is not unusual for your pet to strain its muscles or stretch the scar tissue that has newly formed in the operative site, causing lameness. This lameness is typically rapid in onset and gradually gets better over 3-5 days. Treatment with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (Carprofen, Previcox, etc.) is appropriate during these episodes. Be sure to contact your veterinarian to ensure that your pet will be receiving the proper dose prior to giving any medication and that is safe for them to be on long term!!

If your pet does not have consistent weight bearing on the operated leg by 6 weeks after surgery, or if you have concerns, you should schedule a recheck appointment with your veterinarian. This will help determine if there are any complications and help us take the proper steps to correct the problem if needed. If you have any questions or problems during your pet's rehabilitation, please do not hesitate to contact us. Thank you for letting Lone Star Surgical Specialists take care of you and your pet!