CARE FOR PARALYZED PETS

Caring for Your Paralyzed Pet

Serious spinal injuries and paralysis are not uncommon in dogs, especially dogs that suffer from intervertebral disk disease. In some cases, dogs are paralyzed in just the rear legs, but sometimes they are paralyzed in all 4 legs.

Hopefully paralysis is temporary during recovery, but sometimes paralysis is permanent. Here is some advice for caring for a paralyzed pet.

Confinement
Keep your pet in a clean, well-padded, confined area like a crate, playpen, or laundry room. If he/she is not moving around, rotate body position every 3-4 hours.

Cleanliness
Your pet will have to rely on you to help them stay clean. Your pet will probably not be able to control urination and defection voluntarily and will eliminate where laying, so be sure to keep the bedding clean and dry. Urine and fecal material can cause skin irritation and even serious bed sores. Bathe as needed with gentle, moisturizing/oatmeal based shampoo that won't dry out the skin. Other products like baby wipes and dry shampoos can be used if you find that your pet is frequently becoming dirty. Diapers can be used if necessary, but be sure to change them often and wash and dry the skin often as well.

Bed sores and ulcers can occur as a result of your pet laying down all of the time or dragging the legs when trying to move. Hindlimb sores may occur over the top of the feet, on the legs and hips, or near the tail. Forelimb sores generally occur on the elbows. Orthopedic beds may help to prevent sores by providing more padding. If using a harness or a sling to walk your pet outside, booties may help to prevent sores from developing on the toes. If your pet starts developing sores, please see your veterinarian right away.

A Walk-About harness allows you to comfortably support most of your pet's weight to allow him/her to walk with the front legs. Do not allow the feet or toes to drag on rough surfaces to prevent sores.

Rehabilitation Therapy
Postoperative rehabilitation therapy is crucial for paralyzed pets. Please make a consult appointment with our rehabilitation specialists, Animal Rehabilitation of North Texas, as soon as possible to learn more about therapy options and to learn

techniques you can do at home. You can also get more information about a cart, if necessary. This appointment can be scheduled with a receptionist.

Rehabilitation therapy is important in order to keep joints healthy and muscles flexible. Massage the legs frequently. Gently move the limbs through range of motion 10-15 repetitions 3-4 times a day to keep them from getting swollen or stiff. You can do this by making bicycle movements with one limb at a time, moving it in a normal range of motion pattern as if your dog were walking. This can be done with the pet either standing or lying down. Make sure to rehab all limbs that are not moving normally. Another exercise is to help support your pet as they would normally stand with your hands or with the Walk-About. Place their feet in a normal position and support their weight, encouraging them to take a few steps.

Urination:
Bladder expression may be one of the most frustrating parts of caring for your down dog. If you need help, a veterinarian or technician will be able to help you.

Pets who are unable to move their hindlimbs are unable to urinate on their own. Defecation will happen on its own, but your pet will probably not know it. You may notice that when you pick up your pet urine comes out - this is likely due to "overflow." This means that your pet's bladder was full and pressure on the abdomen resulted in release of urine. It is likely that your pet did not fully empty their bladder, so you must learn how to adequately assess bladder size and manually express the bladder. The bladder should be felt and expressed at least four times daily. The bladder will feel like a water balloon in the abdomen. If the bladder is very large, you may not be able to feel it. After expressing the bladder, wait a few more minutes and feel it again. You may notice that your pet relaxes and you are able to express more urine.

There are two methods to express the bladder. Your pet may be standing or lying on their side.

1 handed technique (not for large dogs):

Place one hand under your dogs belly and wrap the fingers up one side of the abdomen, while keeping your thumb on the other side of the abdomen. Gently begin to squeeze your fingers and thumb together and press your whole hand toward the tail.

2 handed technique: Place 1 hand on either side of the abdomen, just in front of the back legs. With steady pressure and increasing firmness, begin pressing on the abdomen over the bladder. It may be easier to have both hands flattened and the fingers slightly spread apart while pressing so that the bladder is stabilized and

squeezed by both. You can also make a fist with one hand and press against a flat hand. The flat hand will help to make sure the bladder stays between your two hands. Gently begin to squeeze your hands together and press both hands toward the tail.

Once urine starts to flow, apply steady pressure until the bladder empties completely.

Do not be fooled into thinking your pet is urinating just because you find wet bedding. Many times this is due to overflow because the bladder has become too large.

The bladder will need to be expressed four times a day until your pet can voluntarily urinate. This generally happens once they can move the legs, but might not ever happen. If you are ever unsure, please contact a veterinarian right away for assistance. Not urinating can become a medical emergency in one day.

If your pet is showing some ability to urinate, take him/her outside frequently to try to go to the bathroom - hold your pet upright in the grass and give him/her a chance to get the idea. Watch closely to see if a normal amount of urine is passed. If there is no urination, or only a little is passed, the bladder must still be expressed 3-4 times daily.

Take your pet to your veterinarian every 3 months for a urine test and culture since bladder infections are very common in paralyzed dogs.

Internet videos on bladder expression:

https://youtu.be/CAaLdeJCIkw (veterinary technician)

http://www.scoutshouse.com/videos/video_bladder.html (veterinary rehabilitation specialist and technician)

https://youtu.be/yoYWs6OEfJI (owner video)

Carts:

More information can be found through our physical rehabilitation specialist or online at these websites:

www.k9carts.com

www.dogwheelchairscenter.com

www.handicappedpets.com

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