

Recumbent Pet Care

A recumbent pet is one that is unable to stand or walk on its own, either because of weakness in the hind legs or in all four limbs. These animals encounter numerous difficulties, such as pressure sores, muscle atrophy, incontinence, skin irritation, respiratory problems, and pain management. This guide aims to assist you in caring for your immobile pet throughout their recovery process.

Pressure Sore Prevention

Prolonged pressure in a single position may reduce blood circulation and lead to tissue injury, especially in bony regions such as the elbows and hips. If not addressed, these pressure ulcers can become painful and susceptible to infection. Preventive measures include the use of cushioning and regular repositioning.

Cushioning

Be sure to use several layers of blankets or an orthopedic mattress. Should you experience discomfort in your knees while kneeling on the bedding, consider adding additional padding. Stacking blankets on top of beds or laying down potty pads can facilitate easier cleaning in the event of accidents.

Repositioning

Change the position of your pet every 4 to 6 hours if they are unable to move on their own. This may require adjusting their entire body or simply their hips, provided they can shift their front end independently.

Loss of Muscle Mass/Strength

To prevent muscle deterioration and promote recovery, assist your pet in maintaining a standing posture 3-5 times each day for a duration of 1-2 minutes. Make certain that their feet are correctly aligned (not curled/knuckled under) and permit them to support as much of their weight as possible while you offer assistance using a harness or sling.

Respiratory Compromise

Consistent rotation and maintaining the sternal position (upright on the chest) are effective in preventing lung collapse. It is important to be cautious of elbow pressure during positioning. Certain patients, particularly those with neuromuscular disorders, may face an increased risk of pneumonia. Monitor for signs of labored breathing or discoloration of the gums (blue or white), as these conditions require prompt veterinary intervention.

Nutrition/Hydration

Ensure that food and water are readily available several times throughout the day. Maintain the same feeding quantities as before the injury or slightly reduce due to lower activity levels. Refrain from overfeeding, as excess weight will complicate the recovery of mobility.

Managing Urinary/Fecal Incontinence

Incontinence can arise when pets are unable to assume proper posture or due to a loss of voluntary control. While your pet is in the process of regaining continence, it is important to manage the situation by:

- Performing spot baths with a gentle shampoo as necessary, ensuring thorough drying without aggressive rubbing.
- Utilizing barrier ointments (preferably ointments over creams, as they provide longer-lasting protection).
- Keeping the skin DRY – If beneficial and not stressful, use a blow dryer with the heat setting turned OFF.

Pain Management

Observe for indicators of pain such as flinching, vocal sounds, or muscle spasms. Engage in discussions regarding pain management strategies with your veterinarian and promptly report any new signs of distress.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation therapy, including both formal sessions and home exercises, can greatly facilitate recovery. It is advisable to consult your veterinarian regarding a suitable rehabilitation plan tailored to your pet's particular condition. Communicate with your veterinary team concerning your pet's progress and any issues that may emerge during the recovery process.