

CARING FOR DOGS RECOVERING FROM MEDICAL ISSUES

After certain medical procedures, your vet will recommend your dog stays on crate rest and/or reduced exercise to allow them to heal. In many cases, your dog will feel (*and act*) ready to get back in the swing of things well before it is safe to do so. The following tips will help keep your dog's brain busy—and therefore tire them out—until they are vet-approved for regular exercise. Don't forget that convalescing dogs might need much more sleep than before—even 16 or 18 hours.

During crate time or bedrest, occupy and tire your dog's mind by feeding him most or all his normal meal ration from a Kong or food puzzle. There are numerous food puzzles and toys on the market, or do an online search for home-made options. Some easy homemade options use containers from your recycling bin, such as cardboard boxes and food tubs, to hide food in (*be sure to monitor your dog when he is eating from food toys*). Once your pet is more mobile, you can hide his kibble in a "snuffle mat" or a rolled-up towel. You can sprinkle it around the room or on the lawn. For a greater challenge, hide his kibble in different containers such as boxes or upside-down bowls and cups. He will have to hunt through these containers to get his dinner.

In addition to food toys, many dogs enjoy chewing. Consider purchasing a few types of chew toys and allow your dog to select their favorite. Choose carefully and monitor your dog, especially if the chew toy is the type where pieces may be chewed off and swallowed.

When approved, try slow, gentle walks around carpeted areas of your home. Later, you can move these easy walks to the outdoors, choosing a route where you are unlikely to be met by other people or dogs who may cause excitement.

Once your dog is up and about, it is time to start training them to do easy tricks for food rewards. Find a good book or online program—one which uses food, avoids corrections, and has easy-to-read, step-by-step instructions. Training your dog using food treats is a lovely way to maintain or build your relationship with your dog after a painful or traumatic experience, and is yet another fun food puzzle to burn your dog's energy.

If you have the luxury of knowing ahead of time that your dog will need bedrest or wound care, ask a dog trainer or your vet about gently and proactively conditioning your dog to enjoy his crate and enjoy, or at least tolerate, wound care and any therapeutic techniques or equipment your veterinary team recommends. In addition, prepare your home so your dog will be comfortable after the procedure (*for example, condition your dog to enjoy a bed on the main level of your home if they will not be able to go up and down stairs*).

FINAL TIPS

Consider a change in scene if your dog mustn't walk. A drive in the car and some free time laying around in a park watching the world go by can be interesting and stimulating without being over-taxing.

Ask your veterinarian if massage or other therapies you can try at home would be helpful. Also, ask them to demonstrate how to pick your dog up safely and comfortably, if you will need to.

Distract your dog with treats during wound care if you have not had an opportunity to pre-condition your dog to enjoy it, or if it is simply painful.

For many more ideas and strategies for helping the convalescing dog, we recommend the book "*No Walks? No Worries! Maintaining Wellbeing in Dogs on Restricted Exercise*" by Siân Ryan and Helen Zulch (2014, Dorset: Veloce Publishing).