Canine FHO

Femoral Head Ostectomy- Post Operative Instructions

Your pet has undergone major orthopedic surgery and needs to be treated with care and caution in the coming weeks.

The following list is a description of restrictions, care instructions and what to expect post-operatively.

If this is unclear or you have questions contact the clinic for further instruction.

(512) 428-6167 or Surgery@vssaustin.com

The femoral head ostectomy (FHO) is a unique procedure that will require a short period of rest followed by aggressive physical therapy. Because the FHO essentially removes the ball in socket mechanism of the hip joint, the muscle and soft tissue surrounding the head of the femur will have to be strong enough for your pet to regain full range of motion (ROM).

For your pet to make a full recovery, you will need to encourage them to be active and put weight on the repaired leg.

1. **Pain Management:** This surgery is a painful procedure and pain management is a necessity. The protocol used today utilizes a pre-operative epidural. This is a pain block that does not inhibit motor (muscle) function. Therefore, when the anesthesia has worn off the pet can use his/her legs but will retain some pain relief. Continued pain control is a MUST during your pets’ recovery, the appropriate medications will be sent home post operatively. Be sure to administer these medications as directed and until ALL doses are finished. This will keep your pet comfortable and aid in a speedy recovery. If you feel at any time the pain is not adequately controlled please contact the clinic. Some side effects of these medications may include: nausea/upset stomach, constipation or diarrhea. It is best to give these medications with food.

2. **Antibiotics:** Your pet will be sent home with a course of antibiotics to prevent post-operative infection. Follow the prescribed schedule on the label. Finish all doses of medications.

3. **Exercise:** Crate confinement with only short, leashed potty breaks is essential for the first 14 days following surgery. It is best to use a 4 ft.-6 ft. leash, DO NOT use a retractable or long line leash. If extra support is needed, use a towel/sling positioned under the belly in front of the back legs to help support your pets rear when standing and walking. Be very mindful of slick surfaces such as wood or tile floors as they can cause your pet to fall/slip resulting injury to the surgical site. It is okay to carry your pet to a potty spot, be careful not to put their full weight on the recovering leg when setting them down. Your recovering pet needs to be taken out alone for potty breaks, keep housemates separated during recovery. DO NOT allow your pet to use stairs, be off leash, run, jump, play, roughhouse, or be loose in the house. These activities compromise the surgical site and can result in complications including delayed healing and extended recovery time.

4. **Feeding:** Your pet may have an upset stomach the night of surgery as a side effect of the medications used. Offer ¼ of the normal amount they are fed. If they do not want to eat do not force it. If they eat and vomit pull the food until tomorrow morning. If they eat and are able to hold down the food for an hour you may offer more in small increments throughout the night. Unless advised by the veterinary staff to feed a specific diet, it is best to offer the food your pet normally eats as to reduce the likely hood of an upset stomach due to a food change.

5. **Licking:** Licking is NEVER OKAY. Licking prevents healing and leads to the opening and infection of the surgical site. It is imperative during recovery that your pets E-collar be on at ALL times, even when they are in the kennel. DO NOT allow housemates to lick the incision site. This will delay your pets’ recovery and can result in costly postoperative complications.

6. **Incision Site Care:** You should not need to clean the incision site; it heals best if left alone. Some bleeding and seeping in the first few days is to be expected, gentle pressure may be applied to the incision site with a clean towel or gauze. If you must clean the incision site use a small amount of hydrogen peroxide. Dab, DO NOT wipe the incision. DO NOT apply any topical ointments, sprays, salves or bandages as this traps bacteria at the surgical site and can result in infection.

7. **Ice/Cold Compress:** Ice the incision site for 10 minutes 3-4 times a day for the first 3 days after surgery. Cold compresses will aid with swelling and pain. A bag of frozen peas/corn or orthopedic gel packs are appropriate for this. Be sure to put a barrier such as a clean towel or cloth between the cold source and the incision site/skin. If
8. **Warm Compress:** Warm compresses may be applied to the incision site days 4-6 after the surgery for 10 minutes 3-4 times a day. Warm compresses at this time will improve circulation and promote healing. Orthopedic gel packs or a sock/pantyhose with rice placed in the microwave for 1-2 minutes are appropriate for this. Test the compress against your skin before applying it to your pets’ incision to prevent burns. If the compress is too hot for you to hold on your skin for a minute allow it to cool a bit before applying it to your pets’ incision. If this action causes your pet stress or to struggle, don’t do it.

9. **Rechecks:** Your pets first re-check will be 10-14 days following surgery, at this time sutures/staples may be removed and further care instructions will be given.

In the coming weeks your pet will need to return for rechecks. Through physical examination and X-rays Dr. Lewis will be able to evaluate and make activity recommendations according to the specific needs of your pet. If there is a discrepancy between the post op sheet and instructions you are given by the veterinary staff, please follow the instructions from the veterinary staff as they will have the most current recommendations for your pet. Call the clinic if you have questions.

Below is a tentative recovery schedule following an FHO surgery:

**Weeks 1-2:** The first weeks after surgery will be the most painful for your pet. Follow prescription instructions closely, as they will help to reduce pain/inflammation and prevent infection.

- Crate confinement with only short, leashed potty breaks is essential for the first 14 days following surgery.
- Beginning week 2 of recovery your pet may be house confined. Crating/Kenneling your pet when you leave the home is highly encouraged to prevent postoperative complications.
- If you have slick floors in your house such as tile or hardwood, be careful especially in the first 48 hours after surgery that your pet does not slip and fall. A towel or sling under the abdomen just in front of the back legs will provide support for the back end. This is especially important the night you arrive home from surgery, as the sedatives may effect your pet’s coordination.
- The cone/lampshade style E-collar is the most effective for detouring licking postoperatively with this type of surgery. DO NOT use the inflatable inner tube or neck brace “bite not” E-collars as they do not provide enough of a barrier to prevent licking at this location on the body.
- Starting day 10 after surgery, begin short leash walks with your pet. Slowly build this activity by going 1-2 houses down the first day then adding 1-2 more the next day.
- Allow rest for a minimum of 2 hours in between each walk session. All walks will need to be paced slowly to encourage equal weight bearing on all limbs. Speedy, quick walks result in prolonged inflammation, pain, not using the leg/holding it up and damage to surgical site. Using a harness may help with walking your pet. The pace of a walk should be similar to a wedding march or “wagon walk”/ slow trudge. This activity is different from a potty break and should consist of a consistent 5 minutes of walking – not sniffing for 4 minutes and walking for 1. Keep the leash short to prevent lunging or bolting as these motions can be damaging.
- Watch for signs of discomfort, swollen joints, swollen tissue or lameness during or after increased activity. If your pet seems stiff or sore the next day or stops putting weight on the leg, discontinue the activity. Let them rest for a day or two. Decrease the distance and try again. Because physical therapy is such an important part of recovery after an FHO, it is important to give all medications. This will help decrease discomfort and inflammation.
- Starting week 2 your dog will probably be feeling better on the repaired leg than it has in a while, so be careful not to let them convince you that they are ready to run and play—They are NOT. If your dog is overly energetic when confined ask about crate activities to help with boredom or sedatives that may be prescribed.
- DO NOT use a retractable leash for walks.
- This activity should NOT be done with multiple pets at the same time.
- If your pet is overly stimulated and pulling/jerking on the leash when walking outdoors DO NOT CONTINUE the activity in this location. Timed walks can be done in your home or backyard. Your pet NEEDS TO BE ON A LEASH.
- If restricted activity is causing weight gain in your pet, decrease the amount that you are feeding your to promote good health and a safe recovery. Excess weight is hard on the joints, especially the knees.
✓ You will have a recheck with Dr. Lewis 10-14 days following the surgery. Staples/sutures are typically removed at this time if healing is going well. Please listen carefully to any instructions and activity restrictions recommended at the recheck.

**Weeks 3-4:** Following the first recheck you may be encouraged to exercise your pet in order to build strength and flexibility. After this recheck pets are typically able to resume normal activity. **Listen carefully to any instructions you are given at your recheck, as these will be specific to your pets’ healing.**

✓ Walking your dog in small figure 8’s on a leash around the house encourages putting weight on the leg and builds confidence and coordination. While your dog is standing, you may also push their rear end back and forth in a fishtailing motion to encourage them to put equal weight on both legs.

✓ If your pet is overly stimulated and pulling/jerking on the leash when walking outdoors DO NOT CONTINUE the activity in this location. Timed walks can be done in your home or backyard. Your pet NEEDS TO BE ON A LEASH when doing this activity.

✓ If you start to notice that less activity after surgery is causing weight gain in your pet, decrease the amount that you are feeding your pet to maintain good health. Excess weight is hard on the joints and can prolong recovery.

✓ By the end of this recovery period walks should be in the 10-20 minute range and tolerated well. Increase the duration of your walks as much as possible without causing your pet any discomfort. If your dog seems uncomfortable walking longer distances, increase the number of walks per day but keep the distance the same.

✓ If you have access to a pool, some water therapy is okay but NOT unattended. Your dog should NOT be swimming in water so deep they cannot touch the bottom, or jumping in and out. Swimming activity should NOT exceed 10 minutes.

**WEEKS 5-6:** If all has gone well, your pet should be almost fully healed. After evaluation Dr. Lewis will make further activity recommendations.

✓ Some lameness or an uneven gait may be present. These factors can take up to 3 months of exercise and physical therapy to resolve completely.

✓ Depending on the reason for your pet’s FHO (for ex. whether it is congenital, a result of dysplasia, or a traumatic injury) they may require more or less time to heal.

**After a successful surgery, owner compliance is the most important factor in recovery.**

Please be careful and patient with your pet during this time. Following these instructions closely will ensure a speedy recovery and keep your pet from re-injuring themselves.