Tibial Plateau Leveling Osteotomy “TPLO”

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

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 patient can use his/her legs but will retain some pain relief. Continued pain control is a MUST during your pet’s 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:** STRICT CRATE CONFINEMENT IS CRITICAL during this recovery. Short, leashed potty breaks to the front or back yard are the only “activity” your dog should be participating in. It is best to use a 2 ft.-4 ft. leash, DO NOT use a retractable or long line leash. Use a towel/sling positioned under the belly in front of the back legs to help support your pet’s 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 in 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 will need 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, extended recovery time and in severe cases fracturing of the surgical site.

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 likelihood of an upset stomach due to a food change.

5. **Licking:** Licking at the incision site is NEVER OKAY. This action prevents healing and results in the opening and infection of the incision site. DO NOT allow housemates to lick or paw at the surgical site as this can result in costly postoperative complications. **It is imperative during recovery to keep your pets’ e-collar on at ALL times,** even when they are in the
 kennel. The veterinary staff will advise at rechecks when it is okay to discontinue its use.

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 dilute hydrogen peroxide and dab DO NOT wipe. 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 this action causes your pet stress or to struggle, don’t do it.

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 pet’s 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. **Bruising/Swelling:** Bruising around the incision site and down the leg is normal and tends to increase for up to 2 days after surgery then slowly resolve. Swelling is not unusual and will commonly occur at the joint below the surgery developing 2-3 days post-op. This may feel gelatinous (like Jello-O) and is called edema, it too will resolve a few days after it develops. Cold and warm compresses, as mentioned above can help decrease these factors.

10. **Rechecks:** Your pet’s 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. 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 a TPLO surgery.

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

- **STRICT CRATE CONFINEMENT IS A MUST** during the first 4 weeks of recovery. Short leash walks for bathroom breaks ONLY! When bringing your pet on a potty break it is best to use a 2ft-4ft leash. DO NOT use a retractable leash.
- If they experience trouble standing/walking a towel or sling under the belly in front of the back legs can help support the back end. It is ok to carry your pet outside for a potty break. Be careful when setting them down that you do not put their full weight on the leg that had surgery.
- If there are multiple pets in the household it is best to keep your dog separate from the others and take them out for potty breaks alone.
- DO NOT – allow your pet to be off leash, use of stairs, run around the house, roughhousing, playing or jumping. These activities compromise the surgical site and can result in complications including the fracture of your pets’ leg.
- 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.

**Weeks 3-4:** Following your re-check, continue with the same activity restrictions advised during weeks 1-2.
- Continue prescribed medications as they promote healing by reducing pain, inflammation and preventing infection.
- STRICT CRATE CONFINEMENT IS A MUST. Short leash walks to the front or back yard for bathroom breaks ONLY! When bringing your pet on a potty break it is best to use a 2ft-4ft leash. DO NOT use a retractable leash or allow them to be off leash even if in the backyard.
- 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.
- If they experience trouble standing/walking a towel or sling under the belly in front of the back legs can help support the back end. It is okay to carry your pet outside for a potty break. Be careful when setting them down that you do not put their full weight on the leg that had surgery.
- If there are multiple pets in the household it is best to keep your dog separate from the others and take them out for potty breaks alone.
- DO NOT – allow your pet to be off leash, use of stairs, run around the house, roughhousing, playing or jumping. These activities compromise the surgical site resulting in complications including prolonged recovery time and in some cases the fracture of your pets’ leg.

**Weeks 5-6:** Following your re-check, it may be safe to start short leash walks to build strength. Below are some important points to remember.
- At this time 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 and you are concerned about them re-injuring themselves, ask about crate activities to help with boredom or in sedatives that may be prescribed if necessary.
- Your pet should still be crate confined until advised otherwise by veterinary staff, if approved by Dr. Lewis you may start short leash walks.
- If Dr. Lewis has cleared your pet for this activity you may start short leash walks. DO NOT use a retractable leash. Beginning week 3 your pet will need to ease into activities. You may take them on 2 to 4 walks lasting 5 minutes ONLY per 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 to the knee.
- Watch for signs of discomfort, swollen joints, swollen leg tissue or lameness and discontinue the activity for the day if these occur. If experiencing these symptoms the next day allow 1-2 days of rest.
- 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.

When your pet returns for a recheck X-rays will be taken to help track the progress of healing. The doctor will be able to access healing and make additional activity recommendations.

**Weeks 7-8:** At this time walks can be increase to 3-4 times daily for 5-10 minutes if tolerated well. Increase the duration of your walks as much as possible without causing your dog discomfort. If your pet seems uncomfortable walking longer distances increase the frequency of your walks but keep the duration the same. Walks should NOT exceed 10 minutes.

- Your pet should still be crate confined until advised otherwise by veterinary staff. If approved by Dr. Lewis you may increase the amount of short leash walks.
- 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 of the pool. Swimming activity should NOT exceed 10 minutes.
- 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.

**Weeks 9-10:** If all has gone well your pet will be visiting the clinic for final rechecks during this time. Dr. Lewis will advise you to increase exercise leading up to resuming normal activities. It is very important to ease back into normal activity routines.

- If your pet is able to tolerate 3 to 4 walks lasting 10 minutes without lameness, discomfort or swollen joints begin 2 walks for 15 minutes a day. Slowly work up to off leash activity.
- If approved by Dr. Lewis your pet may begin house confinement.
- The first time off leash after surgery it is best to take a walk first to help burn excess energy.
- Let your dog off-leash in a safe area where there is no likelihood of the following: bolting to chase a small animal, jumping up or down on stairs or ledges, roughhousing with other dogs, or slipping on wet/slick surfaces.
- The dog park is NOT an appropriate place for the first off leash experience post recovery.
- Pay close attention to your pet; make sure they do not seem uncomfortable. If there is discomfort or limping after their first time off-leash, continue with leash walks and try again at a later date.

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 injuring themselves.