



COVID-19: Managing Conditions at Home.

During this unprecedented time, physiotherapy sessions have had to come to a halt, however managing your dog's condition at home can be achieved with the basic tips and advice mentioned below.

As an NAVP registered physiotherapist it is important to mention that this advice is not prescriptive and is only general advice for owners to follow to help with their dog's condition. An in depth physical assessment is imperative in prescribing tailored exercises to your dog during their rehabilitation.

ARTHRITIS

Arthritis is a common condition found in mainly older dogs, arthritis is a degenerative joint condition where the articular cartilage at the end of the two bones that make the joint become 'worn away' and fluid within the joint dries up, leaving no 'shock absorber' between the bones making it painful and uncomfortable to move. However, this can be managed with non steroidal anti-inflammatories prescribed by your vet.

Please check with your local veterinary practice on opening hours during this COVID-19 pandemic as certain practices are open and medication can still be prescribed, so do not let your dog suffer in pain.

Additionally, and the intervention of physiotherapy and hydrotherapy can also massively help. Owners can also participate in helping by carrying out basic home exercises and therapies to make your dog more comfortable whilst physical exercises are not possible. This can include the following:

Heat Therapy

Heat can be applied to a 'stiff' joint to help with the relaxation of any muscles surrounding the joint and also has the ability to help block pain signals to the targeted area if left for 15-20 minutes at a time. This can be carried out up to 2 times per day to help make your dog more comfortable.

Please check the heat pack or device is not too hot before applying as this can do more harm than good. Heat packs can be wrapped in a towel or pillow case before being applied to avoid this.



An example of a heat therapy device

Controlled Exercise

Not allowing your dog to exercise runs the risk of the joint 'drying' out and the muscles surrounding the joint to become atrophied (weaker). Synovial fluid is found with a joint and if the joint is not being moved, then the less fluid will be produced, which is why it is important to keep moving little and often. An example of this is:

- Slow and controlled lead walking - Carried out for 5-10 minutes 2 times per day
- Exercising in the garden (avoiding steps, avoid throwing balls/sticks etc)

HOME AND LIFESTYLE ADAPTATIONS

Following any surgery or injury it is important to avoid your dog from jumping from high surfaces (out of the car or off the sofa) and ascending and descending the stairs, as these activities will put them at risk of re-injuring themselves. The repetitive force of their bodyweight upon landing will put excess strain on their joints potentially causing further pain and injury. So if you're able to, pick them up and place them down off high surfaces and carry them up and down stairs if you must, or if possible, avoid high surfaces and stairs all together.

Mats

Non-slip mats around the house are a great addition for your dog, especially when laminate or tiled flooring is in place. This allows them to walk around the house without the fear of slipping or sliding which can cause further injury to their already pre-existing condition.

Vet Bed is a great example of this and can be ordered online or from your local pet shop.



Vet Bed

ENRICHMENT

Whilst most of the country is in self-isolation, our dogs are too. If you're wanting your dog to get their mental exercise as well as physical exercise then this is where mental enrichment comes in. Mental enrichment comes in all shapes and sizes, using mental stimulation is a great way of breaking your dogs' boredom. This can be through the use of:

- Stuffed Kongs
- Snuffle Mats
- Lick Mats
- Treat searches throughout the house and garden
- Puzzle feeders

There are many other ways of getting creative, using cardboard from the recycling. Don't be afraid to get creative with things you may have in the house.

Mental enrichment can help tire your dog out (in a good way) and burn off excess energy which they may usually burn off going for a walk. It is very fascinating for an owner to watch and makes you realise how intelligent our dogs really are.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Diet

As your dog may not be as active as they might usually be during this lockdown phenomena, then cutting down on their food may also help. If your dog is carrying excess weight, this may put excess pressure on their joints and have the potential to cause further pain making exercise an uncomfortable task. It is also important to consider a good quality food with added joint care (Glucosamine, MSM, Chondroitin) and salmon oil to help with overall joint health. These ingredients are already added to premium foods which saves the need for supplementing and is a lot more cost effective.

Cutting down on treats (especially sugar filled and fatty treats) will avoid any weight gain. Try changing these treats to more natural ones such as Dehydrated Chicken or Turkey Treats, Sweet Potato Treats, Deer Antlers, Frozen Bones (supervised) or even low calorie treats.



I hope you have found these very simple tips and words of advice useful and if you have any queries or are after further information then please don't hesitate to get in touch.

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LINKS TO FURTHER INFORMATION

Physiotherapy

www.rawphysio.co.uk

www.navp.co.uk

Hydrotherapy

www.choicehydro.co.uk

www.canine-hydrotherapy.org

Arthritis and Informative advice for owners

www.caninearthritis.co.uk

Pet food and products

www.canagan.co.uk

www.petscorner.co.uk

www.differentdog.com

www.petsandfriends.co.uk