

PET PHYSICAL THERAPY

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In an ideal world, our pets would be happy and healthy. But ailments come as they will, and we find ourselves in need of ways to ease the pain of our beloved animal companions. The benefits of human physical therapy have been proven for years, and adapted to meet the needs of your pet, the principles of human physical therapy are also the basis of physical rehabilitation for animals. Animal rehab includes the evaluation and treatment of disorders of the muscles, bones, or joints by means of physical agents – heat, light, water, manual treatment, and therapeutic exercise.

Most people think of physical rehabilitation as an accessory treatment for those who've had an operation, but when it comes to pets, it can be used for a multitude of reasons, not just for pets recovering from surgery. Rehab can benefit any pet that suffers from an orthopedic or neurologic condition, obesity, or deconditioning. In many cases, even if the most obvious course of treatment is surgery for an injury or condition, rehab can be a safe and effective alternative to the operating table.

Rehab can relieve pain and inflammation and strengthen muscles around affected joints to stabilize our furry friends extrinsically. If the muscles around the joint are stronger, the joint will be more stable, thus reducing further joint damage, pain, and inflammation. The pet will be able to function more normally and may even be able to take less medication for pain and inflammation, reducing potentially harmful side effects.

When an animal comes in for physical rehabilitation for the first time, the rehabilitation therapist assesses each patient individually and considers the pet's lifestyle as well as the owner's needs and expectations when establishing goals and a treatment plan. To achieve these goals, the treatment plan may include laser therapy, thermotherapy, therapeutic ultrasound, massage therapy, electrical stimulation, therapeutic exercise, home exercise programs, or aquatic therapy.

Each modality offers unique benefits. Laser therapy stimulates biological processes that lead to faster healing, decreased inflammation, and pain relief. Massage therapy is used to relax the pet and loosen muscles before exercise,

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to relieve muscle spasm and tension, and to help in overall healing by increasing blood flow to the area. Therapeutic ultrasound is a modality that can relieve pain and muscle spasms, while thermotherapy, the application of cold or heat, can help relieve pain and inflammation and speed healing. Electrical stimulation can be used to relieve pain, reduce or prevent muscle atrophy, and strengthen muscles through nerve stimulation.

It is widely believed that the cornerstone of physical rehabilitation, however, is the use of aquatic therapy. The principles of buoyancy, resistance, hydrostatic pressure, and surface tension play big roles in healing. The underwater treadmill can be used for all types of conditions because of its adjustability. The water level, speed, incline angle, number and length of breaks, and duration of treatment can all be altered for the maximum therapeutic benefit for each pet. For example, a dog with partial limb paralysis can benefit from standing exercises in hip deep



water for a few minutes with frequent breaks, while an agility dog can benefit from jogging in knee deep water for 20 minutes on an incline. This can be done using the same equipment – an underwater treadmill.

Swimming is also a great way to facilitate dogs with painful joints to be able to move their full range of motion without compressive forces on them. From the resistance of the water, they can build strength and endurance. The temperature and pressure of the water assist in relief of pain and inflammation.

Therapeutic exercises can strengthen a particular muscle or muscle group, increase flexibility, or increase the body's awareness and use of a limb. A home exercise program is an important part of any pet's rehabilitation. The therapist will explain techniques and exercises to each owner for them to actively participate in their pet's rehabilitation at home. Physical rehabilitation is a low-cost, safe, and effective alternative or adjunct to surgery that can increase your pet's function, improve his psychological well-being and most importantly, improve your pet's quality of life. <<<

