

Femoral Head and Neck Ostectomy (FHO)

Discharge Instructions - Dogs

What to Expect After Surgery

Your pet has undergone a **Femoral Head and Neck Ostectomy (FHO)**, a procedure in which the ball portion of the hip joint is removed to eliminate painful bone-on-bone contact within the hip. Unlike many orthopedic procedures, the body does not replace the removed bone with an implant. Instead, a "false joint" forms from scar tissue and surrounding muscles, allowing comfortable movement without bone-on-bone contact.

Most animals will begin weight-bearing within **10–14 days** after surgery, are walking well by **3–4 weeks**, and return to near-normal activity by **4–8 weeks** post-operatively. Some limping, muscle loss, or stiffness may persist during the recovery period. The success of an FHO relies heavily on **controlled activity and diligent physical therapy**, especially during the first several weeks after surgery.

Weeks 1–2

Your pet will probably not be using the leg at the time of discharge, but most animals will begin weight-bearing within 10–14 days after surgery.

Your pet should be confined to a crate, exercise pen, or small room and taken outside on a short leash (6 feet or less) only to go to the bathroom.

Jumping, running, and playing are STRICTLY prohibited. Stair climbing should be avoided whenever possible.

Unrestricted activity may result in delayed healing and a poorer functional outcome.

A sling should be used to support the hind end until your pet is comfortably using the leg independently. This is particularly important on slippery surfaces and when navigating stairs.

Incision Care

DO NOT allow your pet to lick, chew, rub, or scratch at the surgical site. This can result in infection and delayed healing.

The lick sleeve should remain on at all times until the recheck appointment in 14 days. If your pet is removing the sleeve or licking through it, a rigid plastic Elizabethan collar (e-collar) must be used. Inflatable collars are generally not effective.

It is common to see bruising and mild to moderate swelling around the incision site following surgery.

Please contact us if you notice:

- Excessive swelling
- Redness
- Discharge from the incision
- Separation of the incision edges
- Increased pain or decreased use of the leg after initial improvement

Ice and Heat Therapy

For the first **24–72 hours**, ice may be applied to the surgery site for **10–15 minutes, 2–3 times daily** to help reduce pain and inflammation.

Ice packs should never be placed directly against the skin. Use a damp towel between the ice pack and the surgery site.

After **72 hours**, warm compresses may be applied for **10–15 minutes, 2–3 times daily** for up to one week.

A warm compress can be made by soaking a washcloth in warm (not hot) water, wringing it out, placing it inside a plastic bag, and applying it to the surgery area.

Physical Therapy

It is not unusual for patients to be intermittently non-weight-bearing on the surgical limb for up to two weeks after surgery. Physical therapy becomes very important, especially for pets reluctant to use the leg.

Passive Range of Motion (PROM) should begin **1–2 days after surgery**.

Perform **3–4 times daily**, gently moving the leg through a normal walking motion for **20–30 repetitions per session**.

A video demonstration of physical therapy is available here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9dcYVODa2RQ>

If desired, we can also provide a list of local rehabilitation and physical therapy facilities.

Diet and Bowel Movements

Your pet may resume their regular diet tomorrow. A small meal may be offered tonight, but do not be concerned if appetite is decreased following anesthesia.

It is common for bowel movements to be delayed due to anesthesia, medications, and hospitalization. It may take up to one week for bowel habits to return to normal.

Recheck Appointment

A recheck examination is recommended approximately **14 days after surgery**.

Weeks 3–4

Leash walks (6 feet or less) may be increased to **10–15 minutes**, up to **twice daily**.

If limping worsens during or after activity, reduce the duration of the walks.

A small number of stairs may be attempted independently if your pet is comfortable.

Running, jumping, and playing should still be limited and only permitted if they do not result in increased limping or soreness.

Weeks 5–10

Leashed walks may gradually be increased to **20–25 minutes**, **2–3 times daily**.

Running, jumping, playing, and stair use are generally acceptable during this period as comfort allows.

Your pet may appear ready for more activity before complete healing has occurred. Following the recommended recovery schedule will help ensure the best possible long-term outcome.