

Femoral Head and Neck Ostectomy (FHO)

Discharge Instructions – Cats

A Femoral Head and Neck Ostectomy (FHO) is a surgical procedure performed to relieve pain associated with hip injuries or severe hip disease. During the procedure, the ball portion of the hip joint is removed, allowing a "false joint" of scar tissue to develop over time. Successful recovery depends heavily on strict activity restriction during the early healing period, followed by gradual return to controlled activity and physical rehabilitation. While most cats do very well following FHO surgery, full recovery and muscle development may continue for several months.

Week 1-2: Strict Rest & Early Healing

Your pet will likely not be using the operated leg at the time of discharge. Many cats begin partial weight-bearing within 10-14 days after surgery. Improvement is often gradual. Most cats are more comfortable by 3-4 weeks and continue to build strength over the following months.

During this period, strict confinement is essential.

- Confine to a crate, large carrier, or small room.
- No free roaming of the house.
- No jumping, running, climbing, or playing.
- Block access to furniture, counters, windowsills, and stairs whenever possible.
- Use a low-sided litter box.
- Keep food, water, and litter box close together.

Unrestricted activity or jumping may result in delayed healing, increased pain, or poor long-term limb function.

Incision Care

DO NOT allow your pet to lick, chew, scratch, or rub the incision. This can lead to infection or delayed healing.

- A recovery suit or lick sleeve should be worn at all times until the incision is healed.
- If your cat is able to lick through or remove the sleeve, a rigid plastic e-collar must be used.

- Inflatable or soft collars are generally not adequate for most cats.
- E-collars are available through our hospital or most pet supply stores.

Some bruising and mild to moderate swelling around the incision is normal.

Please contact us if you notice:

- Excessive swelling
 - Redness
 - Discharge
 - Incision opening
 - Foul odor
 - Decreased use of the leg after initial improvement
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Cold & Heat Therapy

Cold Therapy (First 72 Hours)

Cold therapy can help reduce swelling and discomfort.

- Apply a cold pack to the surgical area for 5-10 minutes, 2-3 times daily.
- Never place ice directly on the skin.
- Always place a thin towel between the cold pack and the skin.

A simple cold pack can be made by placing ice cubes in a sealed plastic bag and wrapping it in a thin towel.

Heat Therapy (After 72 Hours)

After the first 72 hours, warm compresses may help improve comfort and circulation.

- Apply dry warmth to the surgical area for 5-10 minutes, 2-3 times daily.
- Heat therapy may continue for up to one week after surgery.

A warm compress can be made by soaking a washcloth in warm (not hot) water, wringing it out thoroughly, placing it in a plastic bag, and wrapping it in a towel before application.

Only perform cold or heat therapy if your pet tolerates it comfortably.

Physical Therapy

It is normal for cats to be intermittently non-weight-bearing for up to two weeks after surgery. Gentle physical therapy helps prevent stiffness and muscle loss while encouraging formation of a comfortable false joint.

Passive Range of Motion (PROM)

Begin 1-2 days after surgery unless otherwise directed.

- Perform 2-3 times daily.
- Gently move the leg through a slow, natural walking motion.
- Perform 15-20 repetitions per session.
- Stop if your cat appears painful, stressed, or resistant.

A video demonstration of physical therapy techniques is available courtesy of Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine:

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

If you are interested in formal rehabilitation therapy, we would be happy to provide recommendations for local facilities experienced with feline orthopedic recovery.

Diet & Bowel Movements

A small meal may be offered the evening of discharge.

- Resume the regular diet the following day unless otherwise instructed.
- Mild decreases in appetite may occur following anesthesia.
- Bowel movements may be delayed due to anesthesia, medications, decreased activity, and hospitalization.
- It may take up to one week for bowel movements to return to normal.

Please contact us if:

- Appetite is absent for more than 48 hours.
 - Vomiting develops.
 - Severe diarrhea occurs.
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Recheck Appointment

A post-operative recheck appointment should be scheduled approximately **10-14 days after surgery** to evaluate healing and remove any skin sutures or staples if present.

Weeks 3-4: Controlled Activity Increase

- Continue confinement to a small room.
- Allow brief supervised periods outside the crate or room if calm.
- Limited walking around the room is acceptable.
- Jumping, climbing, and running remain prohibited.
- If limping worsens, activity should be reduced.

Most cats begin using the leg more consistently during this phase.

Weeks 5-10: Gradual Return to Normal Activity

- Gradually allow increased supervised activity.
- Running and climbing should be reintroduced slowly.
- Small jumps may be permitted only if no limping is present.
- Continue encouraging normal use of the limb.

Even if your pet appears comfortable early, activity should not be advanced faster than recommended, as this may result in setbacks or prolonged recovery.

Full recovery and muscle development may continue for several months following surgery.