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Tips on how to bed-rest a dog

It's happened, not only has your dog received an injury that results in pain, inflammation and stressful vet visits but the doctor also ordered exercise restriction. But you can't explain it to your excitable pet that they need to be quiet and calm or else the ouchie gets worse. So how do you keep them "active" when they can't be?

Exercise restriction does not mean no exercise or no interaction, it just means we must get creative and modify interactions to give Gracie, Simon, Sophie or Karma different stimulation while allowing the body to heal. These are a series of ideas that you can do with your pet to help lessen the tension of restriction but also increase the number of positive interactions and closer bonding with your friend. Try rotating through different components on a regular random basis to keep things refreshing. The goal is to help provide positive mental stimulation as they recover.

Food as stimulation

Rule number one: Remember not to add more food to daily intake. Rule number two: Know that commercial treats are full of calories and fat. Rather, feed a portion of the kibble as usual and then use the rest in games. If you feed a wet food, swap a component for small apple chunks, carrots, mini-marshmallows or sweet potato.

- **Find-it games:** Hide food in corners of the room... under old rugs... etc.. Once they get used to the idea, change up the locations. You can also hide favorite toys or even people!...
- **Red dot game:** This requires a laser pointer but MUST be done correctly. Chasing a random light without being able to catch it can trigger some OCD or anxiety behaviors in animals (and people too). Therefore, ALWAYS use the red dot as a lead to a target... ALWAYS bring the laser to a treat or toy... ALWAYS end the game with a big reward.
- **Kong:** Most people fill it with peanut butter however this carries a lot of fat and calories. Peanut butter is ok occasionally, but a better alternative is meat flavored baby food (no onion), frozen carrots or veggies. Freezing it overnight provides a long stimulation for chewing and licking.
- **Puzzle feeders:** these can be purchased online or found in pet stores. There are huge varieties such as Kruuse Buster cube, Dog tornado treat dispenser, Maze treat dispenser by Nina, Spot Ethical Seek-A-Treat... Some of them are quite complex!
- **Bones:** **Remember that dogs should NEVER have a bone or rawhide when you're not at home in case of choking.** Also, be careful with what kind you give them. Some bones from pet stores can trigger stomach upset and diarrhea from the basting that is used, cooked bones can splinter and potentially cause serious problems and antlers should not be used as they can crack and break teeth.

Environmental stimulation

- Scents and odors: Dog's noses have about 220million scent receptors compared to our 5 million. Rotating scents gives them something new to process and investigate. While your dirty gym socks can be stimulating, try essential oils. Scents such as lavender, lemon, chamomile and vanilla have evidence for soothing in dogs. Remember though, a small amount can go a long way. Place a few drops about 6-10 feet from the crate or bed and rotate them every few days.
- Visual stimulus: Exercise restriction often means a lot of time in the crate when you're not at home. Rotate the position or place different objects around to give them something new to look at.
- Auditory stimulus: Bioacoustic research with shelter animals has found that long tones, pure tones and tempos which match heart or breathing rates can have calming effects. These studies found that classical and piano music are the best for a calming stimulus while heavy metal or rock music causes more agitation and trembling. So feel free to turn on that classical station or noise machine, especially when you're not at home.
- Curiosity: toys are great, toys are wonderful... toys can get boring. During bed rest, buy 5 new toys and rotate through them, giving Fido only one or two at a time for a few days then change it

Human interaction

- Tricks: There are a lot of simple tricks to teach your friend that doesn't require movement. The goal isn't necessarily to learn the tricks but rather to spend time together in a positive way. Commit a regularly scheduled, daily, 10-15min with your friend to work through the project. All reinforcement is positive, there's no point in getting frustrated if Buster isn't getting it. The updated concepts of training involve breaking action into small, basic movements and then guiding things slowly forward. Clicker training is an easy way to mold behavior. Simple tasks such as shake hands/gimme 5, speak, play dead can easily be taught in most cases. More complex tasks such as putting your toys away, naming the toy and basic service dog tasks can also be done. Go for it!
- Massage: There is nothing better than a good massage. Start gently and then deepen the pressure to the muscle. Simple techniques such as small circles with your fingers tips or even pressure towards the tail can be done. With injuries, remember that most of the time the specific area is not often the problem but the compensatory muscle strain that happens to muscle of the other side of the body as the weight is shifted. Most dogs appreciate shoulder rubs and lower back rubs (just like us!).
- Controlled walking: This depends on the type of injury and the type of restriction ordered. If your pet is allowed to walk, controlled walking is best to prevent further injury meaning always on a harness or leash. Some animals may benefit from a sling which can reduce the weight on affected joints and prevent slips or falls from causing further damage or set-backs. A simple sling can be made from a pillow case or thin towel. If the restriction is extended, consider a well-made harness such as help 'em up or walk about harnesses.

Drugs

If needed, your vet can prescribe stress calming medications. There are a variety of ones including holistic tryptophan, anti-anxiety medications, sedatives, and anti-depressants. Medications should always be combined with positive behavior/training for the best effect. This also increases the chances of getting off the medications quickly and healthily.

These are just some of the ways to help you and your pet get through the challenges of orthopedic or neurologic healing and repair. As time goes on and the pain is controlled, speak with your veterinarian about how to safely introduce exercise.