

SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR POST OPERATIVE CONFINEMENT OF YOUR CANINE COMPANION

Few things are worse than hearing your vet say those dreaded words: “Cage Rest.” Most often the consequence of an injury or major surgery, it means your dog must be kept under tight restrictions – in a crate, out to relieve herself on leash only, and then back in her crate. Running, jumping, and playing are strictly prohibited; even excessive walking is frowned upon. To make matters worse, this period of restricted activity is sometimes prescribed for as long as four to six weeks! How do you keep a young, active dog under wraps for a whole month or more? Boredom and anxiety are your biggest challenges. Here are some suggestions to help you through the “dark days”. They can really be a whole lot of fun!

First step – when you set up your crate or pen (small confinement area) situate it in the heart of the home – the space in which everyone spends the most time. Dogs are social and enjoy interaction with you, if you are out leave on some “white noise” – talk back radio, television, music... This can be calming for your patient.

Now- what to “do”?

Mental Exercise – Feeding

Feeding your “confined” dog – throw away those bowls!

You can keep your dog’s brain well exercised with some of the more sedentary puzzle toys.

Check out these:

<http://www.nina-ottosson.com/>

One of my favourite food dispensing toys – because it encourages quieter play/ doesn’t get caught in corners easily (with its heavy base/ shape) Is the Bob A Lot. Check out Rumi playing here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ntgbywwt-Ms>

Other good food dispensing toys –

Kong Wobbler - similar in function to the Bob A Lot



"Stuffed" Kong



Buster Cube

Standard Kongs - stuffed in a variety of ways are great enrichment too – for example – take some low fat cheese spread and mix it with some dry kibble – stuff it in your Kong – and freeze! Frozen Kongs take longer to empty. (Have a few ready to go in the freezer)

Here is another, more “low tech” way to extend feeding time.....

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

So throw the food bowls away – and get a bit more creative!



Challenging mental exercises can be as tiring as physical exertion!

What a fantastic opportunity to do a whole ton of training!

You can certainly train and practice lots of non-active behaviours such as Stay, Nose Touch, Paw Touch, Relax, Find It (low-activity version), Hold It, Rest Your Head, Polite Leash Walking, and many more.

Clicker training: put simply, is positive reinforcement training - using a sound (a “click”) or simple short word “good” to mark behaviour you like at the moment it occurs, and rewarding your dog with a little soft treat.

Here are some links to show you the way ☺

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC367wKGI4M>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7TxvHDVX2rQ>

Behaviour Shaping can be particularly good for that brain-drain effect.

Careful behaviour choices for these prolonged confinement periods (small, precise behaviours rather than big, active ones) can keep you and your dog playing by the restricted activity rules.

Free shaping is great for encouraging a dog who is somewhat shut down to offer behaviours, because he can't be wrong. Anything he does that even remotely relates to the exercise gets clicked and treated. Once the dog is easily offering random behaviours, then you can, if you choose, switch to basic shaping with a goal behaviour. Here are a couple of free shaping exercises you can experiment with:

- **101 Things to Do with a Box** – You can use any old cardboard box for this, or it doesn't even have to be a box! You can play "**101 Things to Do with Anything.**"

Your dog can be on leash, or off, if he'll stay and keep working with you. Set a chair or cushion a metre back from the box or object, sit in the chair, and wait. As with the "Place" exercise, you're looking for tiny pieces of behaviour to click and treat – any behaviour that relates to the box – a look, a step, a sniff, a push ... only this time you have no specific goal in mind, and you don't have to build up to a behaviour – random behaviours are fine.

Click on the link and watch!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGXJwkO_yk0

If your dog gets hung up on one particular behaviour you can stop clicking that one and wait for something else. The more confident your dog is about offering behaviours, the more easily you can just quit clicking one thing and wait for another. At some point, if you wish, you can decide on a goal behaviour based on the ones your dog has offered, and shape it into something specific – front feet only in the box; hind feet only in the box; all four feet in the box; turn the box over; fetch the box; or...?

- **Body Parts / "Animal Acting" – Body Parts shaping** helps your dog learn to offer behaviour, and it also helps you realise how precise this process can be for shaping the tiniest of movements.

Sit in a chair/ on a cushion with your dog facing you, and watch your dog closely for a movement in one of his body parts. Even a tiny movement will do. For example, you could watch for a flick of his ear, a turn of his head, the lift of a paw, or a tongue flicker.

When you have captured one of these movements with your click and treat, that's the one you'll continue to focus on. Sit and wait for another movement of that same body part. Click and treat. Your goal is to reinforce that accidental behaviour until your dog begins deliberately offering it. When he does, you can name it, incorporate it into a trick routine, or keep working with it to shape it into something bigger if you choose.

Environmental Aids.

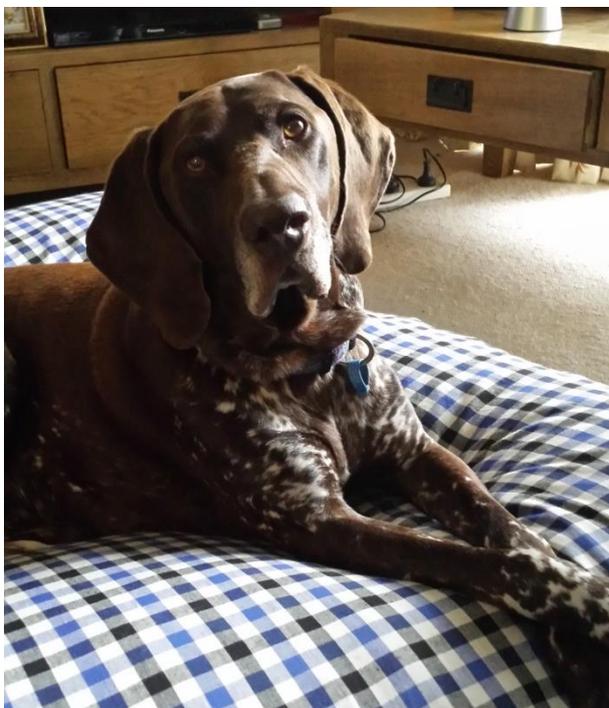
Many dogs find classical music quite settling – an example are the CD’s “Through a Dog’s Ear”

I would recommend that you consider using an Adaptil® collar for your dog during the first weeks of confinement. The collar lasts a month and must be fitted correctly – as it relies on the warmth of your dog’s body to emit a calming synthetic pheromone. The “dog appeasement pheromone” is said to mimic the calming pheromones a mother dog emits when she is nursing her puppies.

Nutraceuticals such as Zylkene may also have a calming effect. Calming herbs for dogs such as chamomile can be useful. There are a variety Chinese herbal combinations which can also be helpful. (These should be selected with the help of a vet with a good understanding of Chinese herbal medicine and your dog.)

Your vet (or veterinary behaviourist) can also **prescribe** a good combination of calming anxiolytic medications for your dog. A course of anxiolytic medication, (additional to good analgesia) can be most useful to get you and your dog through the first few weeks, when strict cage rest is likely the most crucial.

Massage of any description (for example: Remedial, T Touch, Shiatsu, Bowen Therapy) – can be both nourishing and calming for a healing body and mind. If you do it yourself for your dog, it is a great opportunity for calm interaction – and for deepening a positive relationship with your much loved canine “patient”.



If you have any questions about the information provided here or need further guidance,

Please contact:

Drkatg2407@gmail.com

Dr Kat Gregory BVSc.MACVSc. (animal behav; anaesth & crit care)

Applied animal behaviourist

Acupuncture – IVAS

www.creativeanimalsolutions.com