

The Road to Recovery (Orthopedics)

A Guide for Your Pet's Recovery

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The Road to Recovery: Your 12-Week Orthopedic Surgery Guide

Orthopedic surgery is a major event, and the post-operative period is just as critical as the procedure itself. Your diligence over the next few months is essential for a successful outcome. Patience now will be rewarded with a lifetime of better mobility for your pet.

The Two Most Important Rules:

1. **Strict Rest is Non-Negotiable:** The implants (plates, screws) hold the bones in place, but the bone itself must do the healing. Too much activity too soon can lead to implant failure and require another major surgery.
 2. **No Licking:** The incision must be protected with an E-collar at all times.
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Your Week-by-Week Recovery Plan

This is a general timeline. Your veterinarian will adjust it based on your pet's specific progress.

Weeks 1-2: Maximum Confinement This is the most critical period.

- **Environment:** Confine your pet to a small room, large crate, or pen. No access to the rest of the house.
- **Activity:** Potty breaks ONLY. Carry your pet outside or use a sling for support. All breaks must be on a very short leash.
- **NO:** Running, jumping, playing, stairs, or access to furniture.

Weeks 3-4: The First Steps Your pet may feel better, but they are still healing. **Do not be tempted to increase activity too soon.**

- **Environment:** Confinement continues to be the rule.
- **Activity:** Begin very short (5-minute), slow leash walks on a flat surface 2-3 times per day. These are for controlled therapeutic movement, not for exercise.
- **NO:** Running, jumping, playing, stairs, or access to furniture.


Weeks 5-8: Building Strength The bone is getting stronger, but is not yet fully healed.

- **Activity:** Slowly increase the length of your controlled leash walks by 5 minutes each week, as directed by your veterinarian.
- **Physical Therapy:** Your vet may introduce simple exercises like passive range-of-motion.
- **Major Milestone (Around Week 8):** Your veterinarian will take follow-up X-rays to check how the bone is healing. This is the **most important recheck** and will determine the plan for the next month.

Weeks 9-12: The Home Stretch After healing is confirmed by X-ray, you can begin a gradual return to normal life.

- **Activity:** Continue to slowly increase the length and pace of walks. You may be able to introduce hills or different terrains.
- **NO:** High-impact activities are still forbidden. No ball chasing, frisbee, roughhousing with other pets, or off-leash activity.

Beyond Week 12: After your final recheck, your veterinarian will provide guidance on a full return to activity.

 **Call Your Veterinarian If:** You notice a sudden worsening of lameness, significant swelling of the leg or joint, or you suspect your pet has overdone it.