

## Caring for a Recumbent Pet

A recumbent pet is one who cannot stand or walk independently, either due to weakness in the rear legs or all four limbs. These patients face several challenges, including pressure sores, muscle loss, incontinence, skin inflammation, respiratory issues, and pain management. This guide will help you care for your immobile pet during their recovery journey.

### Pressure Sore Prevention

Extended pressure in one position can decrease blood flow and cause tissue damage, particularly over bony areas like elbows and hips. These pressure sores can become painful and infected if left untreated. Prevention requires:

- **Cushioning:** Use multiple blanket layers or an orthopedic bed. If your knees hurt when kneeling on the bedding, add more padding. Layer blankets on top of beds to make cleaning easier if accidents occur.
- **Repositioning:** Rotate your pet every 4-6 hours if they can't move independently. This can involve moving their whole body or just their hips if they can reposition their front end themselves.



### Loss of Muscle Mass/Strength

The saying "if you don't use it, you lose it" is especially true for neurologic patients. To prevent muscle loss and encourage recovery, support your pet in a standing position 3-5 times daily for 1-2 minutes. Ensure their feet are properly positioned (not knuckled over) and allow them to bear as much weight as they can while you provide support through a harness or sling.

### Respiratory Compromise

Regular rotation and sternal positioning (upright on chest) help prevent lung collapse. Be mindful of elbow pressure when positioning. Some patients, especially those with neuromuscular conditions, may have higher pneumonia risk. Watch for labored breathing or blue/white gums, which require immediate veterinary attention.

### Nutrition/Hydration

Ensure easy access to food and water multiple times daily. Maintain pre-injury feeding amounts or slightly less due to decreased activity. Avoid overfeeding, as weight gain will make mobility recovery harder.

## Managing Urinary/Fecal Incontinence

Incontinence occurs either because pets can't posture normally or due to loss of voluntary control in severe spinal cord injuries. Until your pet regains continence, manage this by:

- Checking bedding frequently and changing soiled blankets promptly
- Taking them outside several times daily to encourage elimination
- Layering absorbent pads between blankets rather than on top, as top-layer pads can trap moisture against the skin
- Following veterinary guidance for bladder management if needed, especially if your pet hasn't urinated for over 24 hours

## Skin Inflammation

Check your pet's skin twice daily, particularly in the inguinal region (between rear legs), around genitals, and at pressure points. For skin issues:

- Spot bathe with gentle shampoo when needed, and dry thoroughly without harsh rubbing
- Apply barrier ointments (preferably ointments rather than creams, as they last longer)
- Add padding if pressure points show inflammation
- Keep skin DRY - Use a blow dryer with heat turned OFF if helpful and not stressful

## Pain Management

Monitor for pain signs like flinching, vocalization, or muscle spasms. Discuss pain management plans with your veterinarian and report any new signs of discomfort immediately.

## Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation therapy, both formal and home exercises, can significantly aid recovery. Consult with your veterinarian about an appropriate rehabilitation plan for your pet's specific condition.

Remember to maintain regular communication with your veterinary team about your pet's progress and any concerns that arise during recovery.