



Pre-Spay Exercise Program



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Congratulations on making the decision to have your female dog spayed. Now let's give your girl the best possible outcome and recovery!

A spay surgery is an intra-abdominal surgery that is more complex than a neuter surgery, and requires more time to heal and recover.

The stronger and more fit your dog is prior to surgery, the better the outcome. A few pre-operative strengthening exercises can help prepare your dog for surgery and improve her recovery.

During surgery, the abdominal wall is cut in order for the surgeon to expose the uterus and ovaries. This means that several layers of abdominal muscles are cut, as well as the abdominal fascia which is the support system for the abdominal organs. Think of the fascia like pantyhose, a big run in your pantyhose exposes your leg and reduces support. When the fascia is interrupted, there is less support for the organs and muscles. When this happens, the spine may eventually sag and cause complications later in life.

The incision will heal with scar tissue, and scar tissue is tight and stiff, not flexible like normal muscles or fascia. A tight scar in the abdomen can cause issues with muscles strength, joint flexibility, and even digestion!

A few simple exercises that focus on the abdominal "core" muscles and mobilizing the fascia can help prevent a tight scar and get your girl on the road to recovery.

Start these 5 exercises now so that your girl is already familiar with them before surgery, and her core muscles are starting to get used to some strengthening exercises. These exercises are also appropriate for male dogs!



Exercise #1: Cookie Stretches



These cookie stretches will get the spine and abdominal muscles moving in all directions. This is a great mobilization exercise for the spinal joints and fascia. This is also an excellent exercise for senior dogs, so keep doing this exercise as part of a life-long fitness program!

Start with “Cookies to the Hip”. Place yourself at the hind end and support your dog under the belly. This prevents your dog from spinning around to get the cookie. Ideally, the hind feet don’t move in this exercise.

Lure your dog’s nose to one hip and then let them have the cookie once they get there. Not all dogs can touch their nose to their hip but most of them should be able to do this easily. Repeat on the opposite hip. Repeat 3 times in each direction, alternating sides each time. You don’t have to ask the dog to hold this position, this is a mobility exercise, not a static stretch. Also try cookies to the sky, cookies to the floor, and cookies to the hind feet. These movements will stretch the spinal joints and fascia in all directions.

Exercise # 2: Snoopy Stand



The Snoopy Stand is a 2-leg balance exercise. Before trying this, make sure your dog can balance on 3 legs without any trouble! Lift each foot off the ground, one at a time, and hold for a few seconds. If your dog can hold a 3-leg balance with no trouble, then progress to the 2-leg balance. If the 3-leg balance is a challenge for your dog, then do this exercise with 3 legs on the ground rather than 2!

To do the Snoopy Stand, lift one hind foot and the opposite front foot off the ground and hold for 5 seconds. You don't have to lift the feet very high, as long as they are off the ground. Your dog should be able to hold still and not collapse or sag through the spine. This exercise is one of the best core exercises as all of the abdominal muscles are working here. Repeat 3 X on both diagonals.

Exercise 3: Front & Hind Foot Targeting



Have your dog step up onto a stable target with the front feet and hold this position for a few seconds. The target should not be slippery and should be a few inches off the floor. Working on this exercise post-operatively will help to stretch the fascia. Progress this exercise after surgery by slowly increasing the height of the target.

Next, have your dog step over the target and stop when the hind feet are on the target. Dogs sometimes have trouble knowing where their hind feet are, particularly if they are young dogs. Learning to work the front end independently from the hind end will help your dog with all kinds of things over her lifetime!

Repeat front feet and hind feet 3 X each.

Exercise 4: Backing Up



Backing up can be difficult for some dogs, and we want them to back up in a straight line. Here we have created a tunnel using a plank and the wall to make it easier to back up. Hold a treat in front of your dog and as you move towards them, ask them to back up.

If they are having trouble, you can try “closing the gate”. If you narrow the space at the front of the tunnel, your dog will (usually) automatically back away from it.

Back up 5-10 paces and repeat 3 times.

Relaxation: Paint Rolling



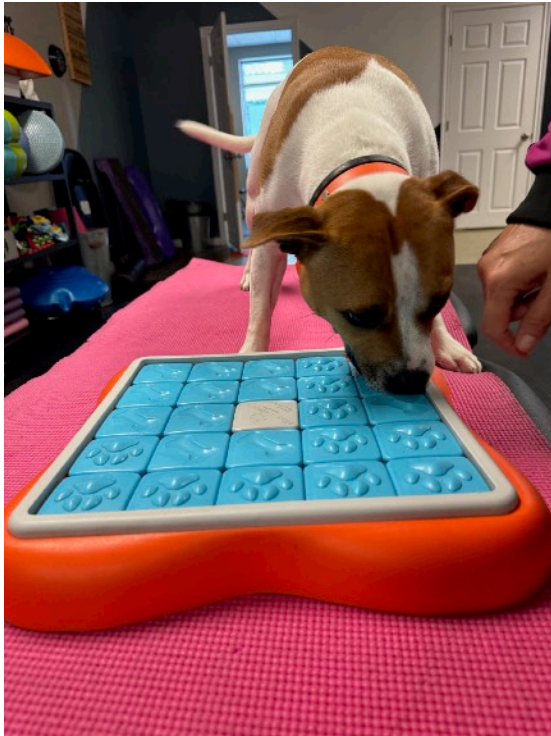
“Painting” your dog is a great way to help them relax, and it helps mobilize the fascia. This is best done at night before bed, when your dog is already in relax-mode. We get our paint rollers from the dollar store, so you don’t need anything fancy!

Using light pressure, just paint your dog in all directions. The fascia is like one big sheet of cling wrap, and it moves in all directions, so you want to paint in all directions (forward/back, side/side, diagonally). Paint the belly and the groin muscles as well.

Continue this technique after surgery, but for the first 6 weeks avoid painting over the belly or incision.

Most dogs LOVE this technique! The Retrievers will often pick up the roller and bring it to their owner! Note - if your dog does not seem to like this and is not relaxing, you don’t need to do this.

Boredom Busters: Games & Puzzles



It's really hard to keep a dog quiet during recovery!

The first few days are usually calm as the dog is recovering from anesthetic and is likely not interested in doing much...but 48 hours later watch out! You'll want to find some boredom busters to help keep your dog entertained. These games and puzzles challenge the dog's brain, and that is actually WAY more tiring than physical exercise!

Jeri is getting used to some games before her surgery. We have a hide-the-treat sliding game and a snuffle mat. There are loads of boredom busters available at pet stores and online, and you can easily make your own. Dogs love anything that involves sniffing!

Preparing for surgery

There are several things you can do to make sure that you and your home are prepared to support your dog after surgery. Your dog will need to stay quiet for the first few days, and the surgical incision needs to be protected. Infection of the surgical site is the number ONE complication post-op.

You will need the following:

A bodysuit or cone to prevent any licking of the incision. The fastest way to create an infection is to allow the dog to lick! The cone or suit should stay on for 14 days to allow the incision to fully heal. The post-operative portion of this exercise program starts on Day 8, so you'll need some boredom busters in the first week.

A confined area away from other dogs, children or stairs. Your dog will be groggy when you first get home and needs about 48 hours to recover from the anesthetic. This area could be in a separate room or in a crated area. Your dog should not be playing with other dogs or children until the incision is fully healed and the bodysuit or cone has been removed.

A leash! It's too early for your dog to be running off leash! Put the leash on before you open the door (this avoids the squirrel reaction). Your dog should be outside for toileting only for the first 2 days (on leash). By day 3 you can start some short leash walks (5 min.) about 3 times per day. You may increase the leash walks a few minutes every day as long as your dog is looking good when walking and not sluggish or limping.

Monitor the incision. An infection needs to be treated quickly, so monitor the surgical site daily. Look for any redness, heat, or discharge from the incision. Contact your veterinarian immediately should you see any signs of infection.