



# The 7 Mistakes

## Pet Owners Make

When Their Dog Has Cruciate  
Ligament Injury or Surgery

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As any fellow dog lover will know, the bond that exists between our dogs and us is sacred. What we derive from this relationship is indescribable. Much of our lives are spent side by side with our beloved pooches. Dogs have become just as much a member of the family as the humans. We share the house- and often the furniture- and we exercise together, socialise together and even holiday together.

When our pet gets injured, or is in pain, this is absolutely devastating to us. Our lives are often turned upside down. The whole dynamics of our relationship with our pet changes. We no longer have a happy healthy dog; we have a patient who we just want to get better. With that in mind, it is important if your dog has a cruciate ligament injury or surgery, that they get the best care and rehabilitation they can- to help them get back on their feet and back to doing the things you love together.

In my animal physiotherapy practice, over 14 years I have seen thousands and thousands of dogs that have had cruciate ligament injury or surgery. Unfortunately there are common mistakes being made by owners, without their knowledge, that are actually leading to a less than ideal outcome, and in some cases, even making their pet's condition worse.

But it doesn't have to necessarily be this way. There is a lot that you can do, to maximize your pet's recovery and help them achieve the best outcome possible. So check out these 7 key mistakes, to ensure you avoid them with your pet.

**-Michelle Monk**  
Animal Physiotherapist  
Director, Dogs In Motion Canine Rehabilitation

# Mistake 1:

Pet owners don't know how to confine their dog properly at home to ensure they recover optimally.

When the body is injured, it starts a natural healing process immediately. Whether your dog's cruciate ligament injury is being managed conservatively or with surgery, it needs adequate time to heal. This means, not placing the healing tissues under undue stress. Your dog should be confined and not allowed to run around for at least 8 weeks after injury or surgery. This time frame is based on the principles of soft and bony tissue healing time frames.



## What It Means For Your Pet:

Dogs are really poor at self-limiting. It is up to us as dog owners to restrict the exercise and protect the healing tissues. Failure to do so can lead to several things:

- a) increased pain – from overusing the limb when it is not healed;
- b) longer recovery - with prolonged pain from overuse, muscles are slower to develop and tissues are slower to heal;
- c) failure to heal – if your dog does too much exercise it may actually cause the surgical repair to fail, meaning another surgery could be required. Or if you are trying conservative management, this may fail and your dog may need surgery.

## What You Can Do:

Get yourself set up at home before your dog comes home from the vet. Work out how you are going to confine your dog. Do you have other dogs? Stairs? Do you have anyone who can come over and take your dog to the toilet if they are home alone and confined? Discuss this with your animal physiotherapist, canine rehabilitation therapist or vet. Being prepared is vital – particularly if you are going to have to leave your dog at home alone for prolonged periods.

## Mistake 2:

Pet owners don't know how to move their dog around safely and avoid pain or further injury for their dog

Following a cruciate ligament injury or surgery, once your pet is discharged from the vet clinic, it is really important to move them with care. When humans have a cruciate injury or surgery, we are told specifically how much weight we can put on the leg, what support/gait aid is needed (typically crutches), and for how long to use them. This information is seldom provided to pet owners for their dog. Allowing them to walk and run without a leash, on slippery floors, up and down steps, and jumping into the car can all lead to increased pain and potentially further injury for your dog's already tender limb.

### What It Means For Your Pet:

This could mean your pooch has to suffer needlessly and for longer than they would have otherwise. Walking on the affected limb with too much weight, slipping on the floor, or explosive actions such as a single jump on the couch could be the undoing of your dog's surgery – as well as causing the dog to be in more pain than necessary. Remember dogs aren't very good at self limiting – and often just want to be close to you



### What You Can Do:

Getting yourself organized to move your dog around safely, right from when you pick them up from the vet is paramount. This includes how you are going to get them in and out of the car safely without jumping – such as a harness and ramp for larger dogs. Making sure they are secured safely in the car in a crate or harnessed in. If you have to brake suddenly, you don't want your pet to fall down and hurt their already painful limb. At home, using a sling under the belly, or harness can really make a difference for dogs too large to carry in and outside, or upstairs. Making sure floors are non-slip and placing a ramp over steps can also make it easier and safer for both you and your pooch.



# Mistake 3:

Pet owners don't realise when their dog is in pain, or how to manage this effectively

When your dog comes home from the vet clinic, it may be obvious that they are in pain. They may be quieter than normal, or nervous, or have a poor appetite. This is typically easier to spot in the early days. As the weeks go by, dogs feel a little better and behavior may improve- they may want to move about more so we think they are fine. But if they are not using their limb, or not using it well – holding it up at times, or licking it, then we need to get their pain re-assessed. Sometimes the most obvious sign of pain is that the muscle is not growing as planned. Some dogs need pain medication from the vet for more than just the typical 1-2 weeks post surgery.



## What It Means For Your Pet:

If your pet continues their recovery and pain is not being addressed adequately, then the overall recovery period will be longer. If your dog is often not using the injured or surgical leg well then I would be suspicious of some pain- muscle pain, joint pain or surgical site pain. Pain leads to not only discomfort for the dog, but also the muscles don't contract properly when the dog is in pain. Your dog may never fully recover if the muscles are not taught to contract properly in the early stages after injury or surgery.

## What You Can Do:

None of us would like to think that our animal is in pain, so it is important to talk to your pet's vet about pain relief. You should be seeing your dog's weight bearing on the affected limb, improving week by week after injury or surgery, as long as you are keeping your dog well confined. If your dog's weight bearing is not getting better or appears to be getting better very slowly, or muscle bulk in the affected limb is very poor, then speak to your vet and have them reassess your dog. Your animal physiotherapist or canine rehabilitation therapist will also be able to assess and treat muscles and joint soreness with a variety of other techniques such as massage, heat, ice, acupuncture, TENS, and also make sure your dog is doing an appropriate amount of exercise for their recovery, and not overdoing things.

# Mistake 4:

Pet owners don't know how to keep their dog occupied during the confinement period, so they give up trying

So your dog has been discharged home and you have been told that you can't exercise them for 8 weeks and they need to be crated. If your dog has never been crate trained before or confined in a pen, then this can be extremely difficult. Expecting them to stay confined, especially when nobody is at home, can lead to distress for your dog, with some dogs even trying to escape.

## What It Means For Your Pet:

It is a priority that we need to protect the healing limb, so we can't just let them roam free because they don't like confinement – and risk injuring the limb further. We need to find activities to keep their brain stimulated



## What You Can Do:

Trying to set up their environment so it is more stimulating can help. Set up their crate or pen in the living space so they can see everyone. If you have to go out for prolonged periods, organise a neighbor or family member to drop in to sit with your dog, or take them for a short walk if their rehabilitation permits. There are many different toys these days that reward your dog with food—puzzles for them to work out and games to play- so they can be kept a little more occupied. When you are home, teaching your dog some new tricks that don't stress the limb, such as 'high five', or touching an object with a paw, hunting for treats under blankets or in boxes, can all stimulate the mind with little stress on the limb. You can also get a dog trainer in or a behaviorist to give you some tips on what suits your particular dog if you are really having trouble. Eight weeks can be a long time!

## Mistake 5:

Pet owners don't realize what they feed their dog contributes to their recovery and long term health

People often feed their pets the wrong foods— pets are often fed poor quality food and insufficient volumes. This is mostly due to poor education about the best type of food that we should be feeding— often through TV and magazine advertising.



### What It Means For Your Pet:

Just as with people, when pets are convalescing or their bodies are trying to heal, they need adequate nutrition.

This is especially so if they have had to have prolonged rest or confinement and have lost a lot of muscle.

If we feed the wrong foods, we could be contributing to a prolonged recovery period, or further health problems and deterioration in overall function, leading to a shorter life. A balanced diet that is age appropriate is really important for your pet, and especially so when they are trying to recover.

### What You Can Do:

It is really important to make sure you are feeding a good quality food. There are many different options available out there. If you feed a commercial food, feed the most expensive one you can afford — preferably one from your vet. Many of these already have joint supplements included to help keep joints mobile and supple. If you feed raw food or prepare your pet's meal at home, make sure you research how to prepare a balanced diet from a reputable source. Your dog needs to have adequate protein in order to turnover new cells during repair and regeneration. Try to feed human grade products if possible with minimal hormones, pesticides and additives. These are known to contribute to many diseases in people so why would we feed them to our pets?



# Mistake 6:

Pet owners think their pet will be able to recover fully without specific rehabilitation

When a dog injures its cruciate ligament or has surgery, several different tissues may be affected including the ligament, cartilage, muscle, skin and bone. The body has the capacity to heal itself, but like any other healing, it forms in a scar. This scar tissue is not like regular tissue in its strength, its elasticity, or how it functions. The muscles certainly will not grow back to normal on their own, just with rest and leash walking. The mechanics of the whole limb will be altered leading to a different gait (walking) pattern and redistribution of forces to other areas of the body. Your vet may prescribe some range of motion exercises and a walking program – but neither of these exercise will grow muscle.

## What It Means For Your Pet:

For dog owners, and often for vets, it can be a challenge to recognise the need for specific rehabilitation, as they see the dog moving in what appears like a normal fashion. Because dogs have 4 limbs, they can shift weight around a little to unload a limb that doesn't work like it used to, and 'seem' to be doing fine. If we were to move these dogs across a force plate, and watch the kinematics – or how the dog's limbs move mechanically, especially after exercise, we would see that the limb does NOT go back to normal.

The implications of this are that if a muscle is still smaller than normal, or if the joint doesn't work mechanically as it used to, this limb will fatigue earlier and thus place stress elsewhere – specifically on the other hind limb – and increase the likelihood of injury to other parts of the body, – including the other cruciate ligament.



## What You Can Do:

Make sure you follow the recommended confinement and exercise restriction time period carefully. Also, wherever possible get some rehabilitation advice and treatment for your dog. Your vet is not a rehabilitation therapist or physiotherapist, and while they are well meaning, may not be able to provide you with expert advice on how to best rehabilitate your pet's limb and get your dog back to the highest level of function possible. Remember also that range of motion, leash walking and swimming are not going to assist with muscle building. Your dog requires a specific strengthening program for the affected limb in order to achieve muscle growth.

# Mistake 7:

Pet owners don't have a healthcare team working towards maximising outcomes for their dog

Your dog deserves the best care possible to ensure they have a smooth and swift recovery. This care is best provided by a team—, working together, communicating and doing what's best for you and your dog.

When health care providers don't communicate, either to one another or to the dog owner, then management gets sloppy, things get missed and outcomes can be less than ideal.



## **What It Means For Your Pet:**

This means the recovery can be very slow and disjointed. As an owner you can be left feeling bewildered and confused about conflicting information and instructions coming from different healthcare providers.

## **What You Can Do:**

Talk to your vet about how they can assist with providing a team approach. Find out who will be managing your dog or doing any surgery, who will discharge your dog and who does the follow ups.

Make sure you have a person who is a point of contact if you have any concerns.

Your rehabilitation therapist or animal physiotherapist should also communicate with you, and the vet clinic, so that everyone is working towards the same goal, with a united front and communication that is open. This means smooth sailing and the fastest possible recovery for your dog.

# Dogs In Motion Helps Pets Optimise Recovery After Cruciate Ligament Injury or Surgery

Now you know the 7 common mistakes to avoid in order to help your pet recover as best as they can and as quickly as possible after cruciate injury or surgery. Getting these sorted is only part of the process

Here's what I recommend for the next step:

Here's what you will learn from Michelle's book  
**7 Steps To Optimise Recovery For Your Dog After  
Cruciate Ligament Injury or Surgery**

- ✓ How to set up your home environment to aid recovery
- ✓ What the best equipment is for your dogs injury
- ✓ How to manage your dogs pain in a healthy way
- ✓ Ways to keep your dog stimulated and motivated during recovery
- ✓ The best nutrition for your dog to optimise recovery
- ✓ How to access the correct exercises to optimise recovery



Head to [our website](#) and [download the guide](#): '**7 Steps to Optimise Recovery for your Dog after Cruciate Ligament Injury or Surgery**'. In this guide, I cover the **7 key areas you need to address to make sure you do the best you can do for your dog's rehabilitation.**

Or, **call us on 03) 9553 0896 to book in with one of our animal physiotherapists** at Dogs In Motion Canine Rehabilitation where we can fully assess your dog, and provide you with an individualised program of step by step instructions for home. Your session also includes onsite treatment, including state of the art underwater treadmill to speed their recovery, maximise their outcomes and get them back to the park in no time at all.

-Michelle Monk  
Animal Physiotherapist  
Director, Dogs In Motion Canine Rehabilitation





***At Dogs In Motion, we specialise in helping dogs to achieve optimum mobility, so that they can live long and happy lives with their owners.***

***Wishing good health to all dogs, we are here to help- just a click or a phone call away.***

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