



Home Physio Exercise Cards

Gentle, staged exercises to help your dog find its feet again

PETSLIKEMINE

INTERVERTEBRAL DISC DISEASE

MY VET / PHYSIOTHERAPIST 	PHONE 	DOG'S NAME 	REVIEW DATE
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These cards are a companion to the programme your vet or veterinary physiotherapist designs for your dog. They keep the approved exercises, and the point at which to move on, to hand through the long weeks of recovery. They are an explanation of what home physio involves, not a programme to start on your own.

THE ONE RULE THAT GOVERNS EVERYTHING

Every exercise here is only safe with the specific approval of your vet or qualified veterinary physiotherapist, for your individual dog, at the right point in its recovery. What helps one dog at one stage can harm another, or the same dog a fortnight earlier, and a recovering spine is not something to experiment on. When in doubt, do less, or nothing, and ask.

WHAT THIS ACTUALLY DOES

Guided home physio keeps muscle and joints in condition, prevents secondary problems, and helps coordination return. The evidence does not show that it speeds the return of walking or changes the underlying odds, so we will not claim that. Done well and consistently, the quiet daily work is genuinely worthwhile, and being able to help is, for most owners, a real comfort.

SIX RULES FOR EVERY SESSION

- 1 Little and often.** Short, frequent sessions beat long, tiring ones.
- 2 Stop at the first sign of tiredness or pain.** Never push a tired or sore dog.
- 3 Non-slip footing, always.** A rug or yoga mat, never a slick floor.
- 4 A harness, never a collar,** for any supported or walking work.
- 5 Never force a movement.** Everything stays gentle, within the comfortable range.
- 6 Stay in your phase.** Change one thing at a time. Do not skip ahead.

STOP AND CALL YOUR VET THE SAME DAY IF YOU SEE

*New or worsening pain, a yelp on a movement, or a hunched, rigid back. A movement your dog had before that is now lost, or a back leg that will no longer take weight. Being unable to wee. Any sudden step backwards. **A dog that suddenly cannot feel its toes is an emergency, go straight in.***

MY DOG'S PROGRAMME (FILLED IN BY MY REHAB TEAM)

Which exercises, how many, how often, and what to move on to next.

Written and reviewed by Dr Alastair Greenway MRCVS and Claire Greenway BVM&S MRCVS. This sheet explains and records. It does not diagnose or prescribe. Always follow your own vet's instructions.

How to use. These cards explain and record. Your rehab team sets the exercises, the amounts and the timing for your dog. Follow their plan over any general guide here.

KEEP THESE WHERE YOU DO THE EXERCISES



Home Physio Exercise Cards

Phase 1: passive work, done to your dog while it rests

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PHASE 1 — PASSIVE WORK

Done to your dog while it is still largely resting. The job is maintenance, keeping joints supple and muscle from seizing, not progress.

1 Passive range of motion

PHASE 1 • PASSIVE



Keeps the leg joints supple and discourages stiffness while your dog cannot move them itself.

START ONLY WHEN your vet or physio has shown you the technique for your dog.

HOW

1. Lie your dog on its side, the upper legs free, and settle it first.
2. Cup the limb above and below one joint and bend then straighten it slowly, like a gentle bicycle.
3. Move only to the first hint of resistance, never into pain. Work toe, hock, stifle, hip, one joint at a time.

HOW MUCH a guide is often 10 to 15 slow reps per joint, 2 to 3 times a day. **My dog:** ____ reps, ____ x/day

PROGRESS WHEN your dog starts to move the leg itself; the work then shifts toward active exercises.

TAKE CARE never force or twist a joint. Stop if it triggers pain or a back spasm.

2 Gentle massage

PHASE 1 • PASSIVE



Relaxes tight muscle, supports circulation, and is a calm warm-up before range-of-motion work.

START ONLY WHEN the muscles are not over a painful back or a healing wound.

HOW

1. Use flat hands and long, slow, light strokes along the muscle, working up the leg toward the body.
2. Add gentle kneading of the big thigh muscles if your dog enjoys it.
3. Keep clear of the spine and any surgical site.

HOW MUCH a few minutes, often just before the range-of-motion work. **My dog:** ____ minutes

PROGRESS WHEN it stays a comfort throughout recovery; it is not something you progress out of.

TAKE CARE never massage over the spine, a wound, or a painful area. Stop if your dog flinches.

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How to use. Passive work maintains the body while the real healing happens through rest. It is not a treatment for the spine and will not bring the legs back any faster.

GENTLE, SLOW, AND ONLY TO THE COMFORTABLE RANGE



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Repositioning, and the first supported standing

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3 Supported repositioning

PHASE 1 · PASSIVE



Turning a dog that cannot shift itself prevents pressure sores and keeps it comfortable.

START ONLY WHEN your dog cannot reposition itself, and only as part of its rest.

HOW

1. Roll your dog as one unit, supporting both ends so the back never twists or sags.
2. Alternate the side it lies on, and prop it upright on its chest for spells, head raised.
3. Use soft, dry bedding and check the skin over hips, hocks and elbows.

HOW MUCH turn at least every 4 hours for a dog that cannot move itself. **My dog: every ____ hours**

PROGRESS WHEN your dog can hold itself upright and shift its own weight; scheduled turning can then ease off.

TAKE CARE watch for any red or broken skin over bony points, and keep your dog clean and dry.

A WORD ON TOUCH AND SENSATION

Gentle contact and letting the paws feel different textures is fine and kind. But a firm toe-pinch to test deep pain is a job for your vet, not a home exercise, and a leg that pulls back on its own can be a reflex with no feeling behind it. Do not read a reflex kick as proof the feeling has returned, your vet judges that.

PHASE 2 — ASSISTED WEIGHT-BEARING

Helping your dog take its own weight again, with support, once your team judges it ready. The foundation everything else is built on.

4 Supported standing

PHASE 2 · ASSISTED



Re-loads the legs so the standing muscles wake up and the weight-bearing habit returns.

START ONLY WHEN your vet or surgeon clears active work (often soon after surgery; later for crate-rest dogs).

HOW

1. Pass a sling or folded towel under the belly, just in front of the back legs.
2. Lift just enough to take some weight, never hoisting the paws off the floor.
3. Set the feet flat and square, support only as much as needed, and keep it brief.

HOW MUCH short holds, often about a minute to start, a few times a day. **My dog: ____ holds, ____ x/day**

PROGRESS WHEN your dog holds a square stand with little support and its feet placed correctly.

TAKE CARE stop if the back end sinks, the dog leans hard on the sling, or it tires.

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How to use. Surgical dogs can often begin gentle standing work early, on the surgeon's say-so; dogs on strict rest wait until the rest period is done. Always check first.

SUPPORT, DON'T HOIST. LET YOUR DOG DO WHAT IT CAN



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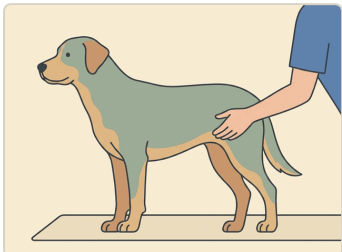
Phase 2: waking up balance and the back legs

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5 Weight shifts in standing

PHASE 2 · ASSISTED



Teaches your dog to feel and trust each leg again, and wakes up the core and balance muscles.

START ONLY WHEN your dog can hold a supported square stand.

HOW

1. With your dog standing square and supported, gently nudge the hips a few centimetres to one side.
2. Let it feel the shift and correct itself, then nudge the other way, and gently front to back.
3. Keep the nudges small and slow, so your dog rebalances rather than steps or stumbles.

HOW MUCH small, slow shifts within a supported stand, building toward a few minutes. **My dog:** ____ minutes, ____ ×/day

PROGRESS WHEN your dog holds steady against a gentle nudge without having to step to catch itself.

TAKE CARE this is a nudge, not a push. Steady the body and keep to a non-slip floor.

6 Assisted sit-to-stand

PHASE 2 · ASSISTED



Begins rebuilding the back-leg and bottom muscles through the everyday movement of rising.

START ONLY WHEN your dog can hold a steady, square sit.

HOW

1. Start with the back end a little raised, on a low step or cushion, to make rising easier.
2. Lure the head up and slightly back with a treat so your dog rocks up into a square stand.
3. Support the belly with a sling as needed; let the back legs do what they can.

HOW MUCH often about 5 reps to start, once or twice a day. **My dog:** ____ reps, ____ ×/day

PROGRESS WHEN your dog rises evenly through both back legs without pushing off through its front.

TAKE CARE stop if your dog cheats with the front legs, sits to one side, or tires; that means enough.

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How to use. These small movements rebuild the basic ability to stand and balance, which is what everything in the next phase is built upon. Quality matters more than quantity.

SMALL, SLOW, AND SQUARE



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Phase 3: rebuilding real strength and coordination

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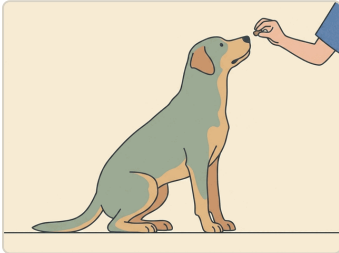
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PHASE 3 — ACTIVE STRENGTHENING

Once your dog bears weight and moves more, and only on your team's say-so, controlled exercise rebuilds strength and coordination. The easiest phase to overdo.

7 Sit-to-stand reps

PHASE 3 • ACTIVE



The strengthening version of rising, building back-leg and core power once your dog can stand.

START ONLY WHEN your dog can rise from a square sit on the flat without help.

HOW

1. On a non-slip floor, ask for a clean square sit, then a treat-lured stand, driving through the back legs.
2. Build the numbers slowly. To make it harder later, face your dog gently uphill or to each side.
3. Keep every rep square: no flopping to one hip, no pushing off the front.

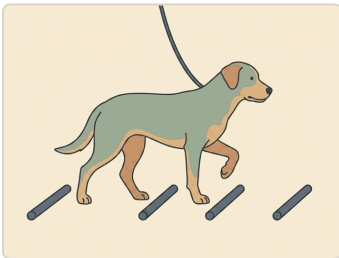
HOW MUCH build from about 5 reps toward 10 to 15, a few times a day. **My dog:** ____ reps, ____ ×/day

PROGRESS WHEN the reps stay clean and even, then add the uphill or sideways version for more challenge.

TAKE CARE a sloppy or one-sided sit means tiredness or soreness. Stop and rest.

8 Low poles (cavaletti)

PHASE 3 • ACTIVE



Stepping over poles makes your dog place each foot with care, sharpening coordination and stride.

START ONLY WHEN your dog is walking, even if still wobbly.

HOW

1. Lay 5 to 8 poles flat on the floor, about one of your dog's strides apart (its back length, for a long dog).
2. Walk, never trot, your dog over them slowly on a lead, on a non-slip surface.
3. Raise the poles only gradually over time, and never above hock height.

HOW MUCH a few slow passes to start, building gradually. **My dog:** ____ passes, ____ ×/day

PROGRESS WHEN your dog clears the poles cleanly with no knocking or knuckling; then widen or raise them a little.

TAKE CARE poles too high add strain without benefit. Keep them low and the pace slow.

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How to use. The word that governs this whole phase is controlled: deliberate, measured exercise in short sessions, not a return to normal activity. Build up gradually.

CONTROLLED, NOT A RETURN TO NORMAL



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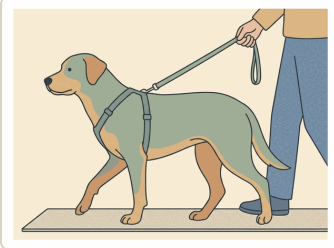
Phase 3: walking, foot placement and coordination

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9 Controlled lead walks

PHASE 3 • ACTIVE



The graded return to walking, rebuilding strength, balance and stamina while protecting the spine.

START ONLY WHEN your team clears walking beyond toilet trips, after the strict-rest weeks.

HOW

1. Use a chest harness and a fixed (not extending) lead, on non-slip ground.
2. Walk slowly, so the back legs take weight rather than the front dragging the dog along.
3. Keep outings short and frequent, and pause for a stand now and then to load the back legs.

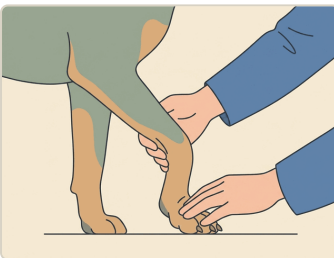
HOW MUCH start at 5 minutes or less, several short outings a day; add minutes only on advice. **My dog:** ____ minutes, ____ ×/day

PROGRESS WHEN the current length is easy with no wobble, scuffing or next-day soreness; then add a little.

TAKE CARE no stairs, jumping, running or off-lead until your vet allows it.

10 Foot placement

PHASE 3 • ACTIVE



Re-teaches your dog where its feet are, so it stops walking on a knuckled-over paw.

START ONLY WHEN your dog is bearing weight but still knuckles or scuffs.

HOW

1. Every time a paw rolls onto its top, gently turn it back onto the pads. Every single time.
2. Practise slow, supported walking over different textures: a rug, a mat, grass.
3. If using a no-knuckling sock or sling, only in short spells so your dog still places the foot itself.

HOW MUCH a few minutes of textured work; replace a knuckled paw as often as it happens.

My dog: ____ minutes, ____ ×/day

PROGRESS WHEN your dog knuckles less and holds correct placement for longer; then add longer, varied walks.

TAKE CARE letting your dog walk on a knuckled paw rubs it raw and teaches the wrong pattern.

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How to use. Recovery is rarely a straight line: good days, then a plateau, then another small leap. The plateaus are normal. Keep the work steady and celebrate the small wins.

EVERY CORRECT STEP IS PRACTICE



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Phase 3: gentle challenges for strength and balance

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11 Gentle inclines

PHASE 3 • ACTIVE



Walking up a gentle slope asks the back legs to push harder, building the muscles that drive walking.

START ONLY WHEN your dog walks comfortably on the flat and your team agrees.

HOW

1. Add a short, gentle slope into a walk your dog already manages well.
2. Walk up slowly beside your dog on the harness; let the head come up to load the back legs.
3. Take any downhill very slowly, or return on the flat, as down is harder to control.

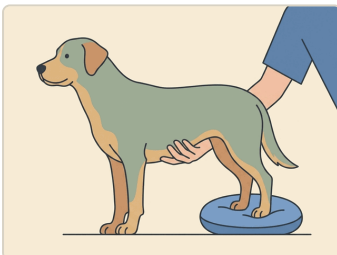
HOW MUCH a short, gentle slope within an existing walk, lengthened slowly over time. **My dog: ____ (set by my team)**

PROGRESS WHEN your dog climbs the slope with no scuffing or tiring; then make it a little longer or steeper.

TAKE CARE skip stairs and steep ground for now. A low, gradual ramp is far safer than steps.

12 Balance on a cushion

PHASE 3 • ACTIVE



Standing on a soft, unstable surface makes the core and balance muscles work without much movement.

START ONLY WHEN your dog stands well and your physio has shown you how, with you steadying it.

HOW

1. Stand your dog with just the back feet on a firm cushion or balance pad, front feet on the floor.
2. Steady it with a hand or sling and let it make the small balancing adjustments itself.
3. Keep the surface only slightly soft to start; less wobble is easier.

HOW MUCH a couple of short holds of 5 to 10 seconds, well supported, a few times a week.

My dog: ____ holds, ____ x/week

PROGRESS WHEN your dog holds steady and calm; then a little longer, or a touch more wobble.

TAKE CARE always spot your dog; a slip or twist is exactly what a healing spine does not need.

TURNS AND WEAVES

Gentle, wide curves and large figure-of-eights are a good late addition for coordination, working both directions equally. Keep turns wide and slow, never tight, and only tighten them gradually once your physio is happy, as a sharp twist is the movement a recovering back tolerates least.

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How to use. Hydrotherapy and a hands-on physio are valuable additions your vet may suggest, delivered by professionals. These cards cover the work you do at home between visits.

WIDE AND SLOW, NEVER TIGHT AND FAST



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Your dog's progress, week by week

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Progress is easy to miss day to day and clear over weeks. Tick the milestones as they come, and jot a weekly line. Take it to your appointments, and log the gains in our recovery tracker at petslikemine.co.uk/tools/ivdd-recovery too.

MILESTONES, IN THE ORDER THEY USUALLY COME

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ First flicker of a toe or the tail | ☐ First time bearing weight in a supported stand |
| ☐ First time shifting weight between the back legs | ☐ First supported steps |
| ☐ First unaided stand | ☐ First independent steps |

WEEKLY LOG

WEEK	WHAT MY DOG CAN DO NOW	EXERCISES THIS WEEK	NOTES FOR MY VET

KEEP THE LONG VIEW

Recovery comes in fits and starts, and plateaus where nothing seems to change for a fortnight are normal, not a sign it has stopped. Some dogs travel further than anyone dared hope at the start. Steady, patient, guided work is what gets them there.

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How to use. Bring this to every check-up. The small gains you log are exactly what helps your vet and physio judge where your dog is and what to work on next.

BRING THIS TO EVERY APPOINTMENT