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Using a Treadmill to exercise your pet: Training and a protocol to best suit your pet's needs.

Objective: To use the moving belt of the treadmill to assist with fluid movement of his/her affected limb. This movement promotes increased use of the limb, increased range of motion, and improved gait pattern. Using a treadmill to walk, trot, do inclines also promotes safe, even muscle building throughout your pet's legs.

Setup: Remove your pet from the area to avoid a fearful response while setting up treadmill or moving it. Position Treadmill away from the wall so your pet can see space between front of treadmill and wall. Often times, dogs will not walk on a treadmill that is tight to a wall. It is unnatural to walk into a wall.

Training for treadmill use:

1) Encourage your dog on the treadmill machine while it is turned off. Use positive reinforcement to encourage him/her onto the end and walk through the front under the control panel/handle bar.

Do not force your pet onto the treadmill. The goal is to avoid further or any injury! Use treats as positive rewards as well as positive verbal encouragement. Do several reps of this until he/she is comfortable getting on at back and off at front by himself/herself.

2) Get your dog used to walking on the surface of the treadmill by himself/herself. Enter on back end then walk to front and exit under control panel. (all while machine is off) Have him/her face the front of the machine every time. Try not to allow exiting from sides or back because when machine is on she/he will not be able to turn around or jump from sides safely. Walk onto back and through the front several times to practice walking in only 1 direction in controlled manner. Your pet is also getting used to the surface of the machine.

3) Once comfortable walking over the machine with the belt off, hold your pet on other side of room and offer treats while turning treadmill on. Do this several times to acclimate him/her to the noise of the treadmill. Gradually move your dog closer to the treadmill by encouraging him/her with treats and praise. The goal is to be able to stand next to the machine while it is on. Check the start up speed to make sure it is a very slow speed to start (0.1-0.5mph).

4) Have your dog get on machine while it is off (it should always be off while he/she enters/exits). Hold his/her leash up near the control. This will ensure he/she stay in a safe position on the treadmill. Place treats or other stimulation in front of your pet. Turn on treadmill to its slowest speed. Use soothing tones to encourage your pet to walk with the movement. If your pet panics, turn off the machine and repeat initial training.

*** Your pet should be leashed at all times while on treadmill for safety. You need to be right next to him/her so you can shut off in case of emergency.**

5) Walk on treadmill as directed (speed, duration, inclines) by the veterinary medical team. When finished with each session, make sure to decrease your pet's speed slowly to cool him/her down.

For routine exercise in dogs with arthritis:

1) It is better to avoid longer periods of exercise because it can exacerbate pain in the affected limb.

2) Instead, do several short exercise sessions throughout the day. For example, instead of one 60 minute walk daily do three 15-20 minute walks daily.

3) Can do small inclines on the treadmill.

4) Adjust incline and speed and length of exercise to appropriate levels for your pet. Choose levels that he/she can do without causing increase in lameness or stiffness.

5) During times of increased lameness (flare up), focus on easy exercise (level walking at a very slow pace for only 5-10 minutes). Small amounts of easy exercise during "flare ups" will keep muscles from getting stiff without creating more inflammation in the affected joints. Rest is important during "flare ups" because the joints need time to recover or "quiet back down".

6) Icing any affected joints after exercise can relieve soreness from inflammation. Ice/cold pack applied to joint covered with thin cloth for 3-5 minutes.