



VetPartners Aus. Pty Ltd trading as Murray Bridge Veterinary Clinic ABN 44 114 962 453

PO Box 5181, (140 Swanport Road)

Murray Bridge SA 5253

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Balance and Proprioception Exercises:

Assisted Exercises:

The following exercises require you to help support your pet's weight with a towel or harness.

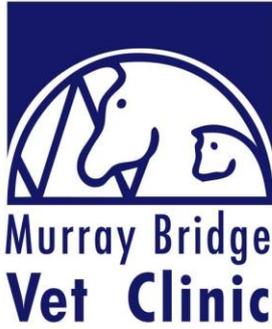
Standing:

When your pet is newly recovering from surgery or a neurological condition they may not be able to stand on their own. Assisting them to stand multiple times a day will help maintain their balance and eventually help them to be able to stand properly on their own.

Place a towel under your pet's belly for you to hold up and use it to support their weight. Clip a lead onto their collar, then encourage your pet to stand. Once your pet is up in a standing position, reduce the amount of support you give them with the towel by letting go of a small amount of their weight. You must make sure that you support them enough that they remain standing; if your pet falls you have not given them enough support. It is important that your pet is standing four-square and supporting as much of their own weight as possible. At first, standing 1-2 minutes may be long enough. As your pet improves you can increase the amount of time they stand and reduce the amount of support you give them with the towel. You can also rock the towel slowly from side to side to encourage alternate weight bearing like they would when they walk.

Walking:

Using a towel follow the steps above to get your pet to stand. Once in the standing position you can encourage your pet to walk short distances with their weight supported by you holding the towel under them. The support from the towel can gradually be removed as your pet becomes able to walk without support.



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Active Exercises:

The following exercises are to be practiced once your pet no longer needs assistance to stand and walk.

Weight Shifting:

The weight shifting exercise is designed to help your pet gain strength while balancing. To begin make sure your pet is standing four-square; this means all legs placed evenly and symmetrically on the ground. Gently push the hips (if you want to strengthen hind legs), or the shoulders (if you want to strengthen front legs), to encourage your pet to bear more weight and balance on one leg. You can push side to side and forward and back. It is important that you never push so hard that your pet has to take a step sideways to maintain balance. Then quickly release so your pet sways back to starting position

As your pet gets stronger you can:

- increase the strength in which you push, therefore encouraging them to balance and stand with more weight
- increase the amount of time that you push for
- practice on different surfaces
- apply pushes while walking
- gently lift one leg so that more weight has to be held on other legs, rotating which leg you pick up

Treating/Baiting:

Treating/baiting is a useful movement for spinal mobility/balance and weight bearing. It encourages your pet to stretch through the spine but also helps them bear weight in a different stance to normal. To carry out this technique make sure your pet is standing four-square and bearing weight evenly on all fours. Then with a treat in your hand, move your hand from their nose around to their shoulder, encouraging them to follow your treat. Your pet should only move their head, all fours should remain in the starting position. You can practice this on both sides and hold in position for longer periods of time as your pet's mobility and balance improves.





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Balance pads/wobble boards:

A balance pad or wobble board can be used to help improve balance but also use all the tiny little muscles associated with balancing. Simply have your pet stand on the wobble board whilst feeding treats. They can stand with either their front or back legs on at a time, or all legs, or one leg at a time. Encourage your pet to stand there by giving treat rewards. As their balance and strength improves you can increase the amount of time they stand on the wobble board, or practice other exercises on it eg. weight shifting, walk them across it, or even line a few up in a row and walk over them all. If you do not have a wobble board at home you could improvise by using an upside down garbage bin lid or a piece of board with a tennis ball glued to it.

Weaving:

As your pet's daily walking exercises improve you can introduce some obstacles. Weaving your pet around items while walking helps improve their balance, weight shifting and spinal flexion. Set cones or any other cone-like obstacle up in a line and walk your dog in and out of the cones, using treats to encourage them to walk in the right direction. The closer the cones the more your dog has to bend, therefore the harder it is for them.

Step Overs:

Encouraging your pet to step over poles or obstacles will help improve their joint range of motion, balance and stride length. Place 3 poles or other low obstacles in a line with about 0.5 to 1m gap between each pole. With your pet on a lead and in a slow and controlled manner get your pet to step over each obstacle. When you get to the end, turn around and walk back over in the opposite direction. It is important that they only step over the obstacle and not jump over. As your pets endurance and strength improves you can:

- Increase the number of poles
- Increase the height of the poles
- Put two poles together to increase stride distance