

# Take Home Instructions: *Stretching Exercises*

## What are stretching exercises?

Stretching exercises provide passive therapy. They also help improve range of motion by expanding tight muscles and tissues.

## Why were stretching exercises prescribed for my pet?

Stretching exercises improve joint flexibility joints.<sup>1</sup> The exercises are commonly performed with range of motion exercises to warm up before strenuous exercises or to help decrease stiffness.<sup>2</sup>

## When are stretching exercises recommended?

Stretching exercises are usually recommended throughout a rehabilitation program. At the beginning of a program, these and range of motion exercises may be the only activity performed. As your pet advances in his or her return to normal activity, stretching becomes an important part of a pre- and post-exercise routine.

## What are the exercise guidelines?

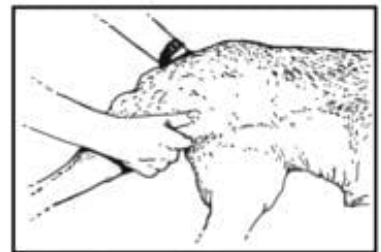
There are two types of stretching exercises: static and prolonged mechanical stretching. Static stretching involves placing the joint(s) in a passive position and holding the joint at full extension without causing pain. Hold for 15 to 30 seconds and repeat 20 times.<sup>1</sup>

Prolonged mechanical stretching is similar to static stretching but held for longer periods of time. Using splints and wraps hold the joint(s) in position for a minimum of 20 minutes or up to one hour.<sup>1</sup>

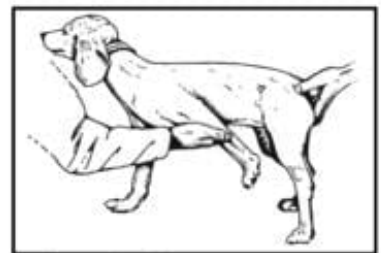
The injured joint and adjacent muscles should be warmed with heat therapy prior to beginning the exercises.<sup>3</sup> Follow warming with passive range of motion exercises. During the exercise, slowly flex the joint until restriction is detected.<sup>2</sup> After completing the stretching exercises, apply a cold pack to the joint(s) to help relieve discomfort.<sup>3</sup>

## What are the safety considerations?

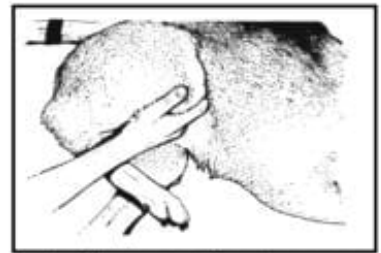
Do not force the joints beyond the pet's comfort level. If your pet is feeling uncomfortable, he or she may tighten the limb, turn his or her head, or try to push away. Do not let the pet reach the point of vocalizing pain or trying to bite.



A dog's knee in full extension.



A dog's shoulder in extension.



A dog's knee in a flexed position.

1. Millis DL, Levine D, Taylor RA. *Canine Rehabilitation & Physical Therapy*. St. Louis. 2004 Saunders. pp 236-242.
2. Bockstahler B, Levine D, Millis D. *Essential Facts of Physiotherapy in Dogs and Cats: Rehabilitation and Pain Management*. Babenhausen, Germany. 2004. BE VetVerlag. p 58.
3. Olby N, Halling KB, Glick TR. Rehabilitation for the Neurologic Patient. *Veterinary Clinics Small Animal Practice*. 2005. 35: 1389-1409.

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