

Crate rest: advice for dog owners

This guide explains how to set up your dog's recovery crate, and offers advice on keeping your dog safe and comfortable during recovery.

It is best to get the recovery crate ready ahead of time so that your dog has the chance to get used to it gradually. If you are just getting started, then we recommend that you first look at "Recovery crate shopping list" to see what you need to get hold of, and also check out "How to introduce your dog to the crate". There is a summary of advice on page 20. The rest of this guide is handy to keep for reference. For example, "How to set up your dog's recovery crate" explains how to make your dog's crate as comfortable as possible.

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Recovery crate shopping list

Your dog will be inside the crate for nearly 24 hours per day, possibly for several weeks at a time. If your dog is comfortable, then recovery will be easier, so do take the time to set the crate up as a pleasant home for your dog.

Get the crate ready ahead of time. For example, if an operation has been scheduled a week or two ahead, then do set the crate up in advance, and introduce your dog to it gradually before the operation. This will help your dog to accept the crate more easily.

You may already have some of the items listed below. Old familiar blankets and towels are better than new ones, as they smell of home. You will probably need to buy a crate of the right size though, as your dog's old puppy crate will almost certainly be too small.

- Crate (see "How to set up your dog's recovery crate" for advice on the type and size of crate)
- Non-slip matting to cover the floor inside and immediately outside the crate (see "flooring", below). You may also need extra non-slip matting to extend from the crate to the garden door if you have slick floors. Matting is sold by the metre by some flooring companies, or use "dust trapper" mats or improvise with non-slip bath mats, door mats, old yoga matting, etc.
- Soft bedding (large flat pad-style dog bed, or a blanket or folded small old quilt)
- Vetbed® or cheap fluffy bath mat, with one or more spares for washing
- Standard or raised food bowl
- Water bowl to clip to the inside of the crate
- Toys, e.g. Kongs®, other food-dispensing toys or chew toys
- A well-fitting walking harness. Mekuti® and Perfect Fit® are two suggested brands. Look for an adjustable harness with a "Y" shaped front (not a "T" shaped front).
- A fixed-length dog lead to clip to the harness.

Optional: either old blankets or a cot bumper to stop draughts

Optional: DAP (Adaptil®) plug-in diffuser, and possibly also a bottle of DAP spray (see p7 for more information). These are available from most vet clinics.

Optional: A dog pushchair (stroller)

If your dog is completely collapsed (cannot get up from a lying position), then you may also need:

- High density foam mattress cut to fit the base of the crate. This can be bought from online foam suppliers. Or a large old quilt or pile of blankets.
 - Several pieces of Vetbed® or old towels.
 - Extra old towels to roll up as props and padding, if needed.
 - Disposable incontinence pads.
 - A hindquarter sling to help support your dog's rear end during toilet breaks. (An old woollen scarf or long towel can be used to start with if needed).
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Introducing your dog to the crate

Top tips:

- ✓ Make the crate comfortable before showing it to your dog.
- ✓ Introduce the crate as a step-by-step process, over several days if possible.
- ✓ Handle your dog gently throughout the crate introduction process, and keep your voice kind and positive.
- ✓ Keep other dogs out of the room during crate introduction.
- ✓ Food can be used to tempt your dog into the crate. But take care not to exceed your dog's daily food ration.

Dogs are quick learners, and they will soon learn to hate their crate if their first experience of it is unpleasant. It is therefore best to introduce your dog to the crate gradually and carefully. Manhandling your dog into the crate and then slamming the door closed will make your dog anxious and is likely to lead to future behavioural problems.

If your dog has an operation scheduled for a few days' time, then get hold of a crate as soon as possible, and set it up well in advance of the operation. Use those few days to get your dog accustomed to the crate, initially with its door wide open.

A positive approach is essential during crate introduction. Dogs are quick to pick up on our emotions, so do your best to keep your voice positive and kind throughout the crate introduction process. Shouting at your dog, or rough handling, will make them anxious about the crate.

For successful crate introduction, the inside of the crate needs to be made to appear more attractive to your dog than the rest of the room. Do set the crate up as a welcoming, comfortable space for your dog before expecting them to go inside. Your dog may choose to come up to you for attention when you first show them the crate. If so, then act in quite a low-key, boring way. You can give them a few kind, reassuring words, but don't reward your dog for coming to you at this point by lifting and carrying them, or with food from your hand or a game. At this moment, you don't want to give your dog the idea that life is more fun outside, than inside, the crate. If you have other dogs, then put them out of the room during crate introduction so that they don't act as an extra distraction.

Food is usually the best way to tempt your dog into the crate. It's a good idea to start crate introduction at a time of day when your dog is likely to be hungry. If your dog will do anything for food, then bits of their usually dog kibble may be enough to tempt them in. For fussy eaters, you may need to use tasty dog treats. Scattering the food inside the crate, initially close to the entrance and then further inside, will encourage your dog to search for it. Some dogs will be more inclined to enter the crate if they see you gently rolling bits of food into the crate – the movement of the food tempts them to follow. Early on, keep the crate door wide open while allowing your dog to move freely in and out of the crate.

Crate introduction is a stepwise process. Encouraging your dog to sniff a little way inside the crate entrance is a good early step. As your dog gets more confident, they'll eventually explore further inside. Eating a whole meal from a bowl inside the crate is another achievement. A further step is for your dog to become confident enough to lie down and rest on bedding inside the crate. Offering a filled Kong® for your dog to chew on while resting will encourage them to do this. Keep the crate door propped wide open through all of these stages.

Only close the crate door once your dog is confident enough to eat and rest inside the crate. The door should only be closed for a short time initially. A good time to first try this is while your dog is busy eating. They may be either enjoying a bowl of food inside the crate, or chewing on a filled Kong®. Open the door again before the food is finished.

Suggested steps of the crate introduction process are listed below. Bear in mind that every dog is different, and that some are quicker to accept a crate than others. For particularly anxious dogs, the process needs to be undertaken over many days and broken down into even more gradual steps. If your dog is not progressing through the steps easily, then take a break and check that the crate is comfortable enough, before going back and repeating the earlier steps.

When using food and treats during crate introduction, be careful not to overfeed your dog. Check how much your dog should be eating each day, measure this out each morning and take not to exceed this, even if some of the food is being scattered onto the floor of the crate or is fed from a Kong®. If using dog treats, then break these into tiny pieces, and reduce the rest of your dog's ration to compensate.

Step-by-step guide to crate introduction

1. Assemble the crate. Check that the crate floor provides even footing (remove the base of the crate if this is going to wobble when stepped on). Cover the floor of the crate with non-slip matting, and then with plenty of bedding. Put your dog's favourite toys and a bowl of his or her food inside the crate (For details of crate set-up, see p9-13)
2. Optional: Plug in a DAP (Adaptil®) diffuser as close as possible to the crate. Spray the bedding with DAP spray. (see p7 for more information)
3. If the room is not carpeted, then place non-slip matting around the entrance to the crate.
4. Prop the crate door wide open.
5. Roll up two towels into long sausage shapes (or use long draught-excluder cushions). Place these on the floor, one on either side of the crate entrance. These should make two sides of an imaginary path leading to the crate entrance, so as to help lead your dog's eyes towards the crate.
6. Pick a time when you expect your dog to be hungry. If your dog is not allowed to run, then put them on the lead to give you some control. Walk your dog towards the crate and allow them to sniff at it.
7. Put bits of dog kibble just inside the crate entrance and let your dog sniff at and eat these. If your dog is not interested, then try dog treats. Break the treats into tiny bits, as you'll be using quite a few of them during the crate introduction process. If your dog is still not interested in the food, then take a break and try again before their next meal. If your dog is still not interested at the next attempt, then check that the crate is set up comfortably, and try again the next day.
8. Gently roll bits of food further inside the crate. The movement of food may encourage your dog to follow. If your dog chooses to explore the inside of the crate, then allow them to do so on the end of a loose lead. Do *not* shut the crate door at this stage.
9. If your dog either finds the bowl of food and eats it, or chooses to lie down in the crate, then let them do so. Do *not* shut the crate door at this stage.
10. Allow your dog to step out of the crate when they are ready to do so.
11. Later in the day, or during the next day, repeat steps 4 to 8. Keep the crate door propped wide open throughout.

12. Fill a Kong® and put this inside the crate. Let your dog chew on this inside the crate. You may need to repeat steps 6 and 7 to encourage your dog to enter the crate before they find the Kong®.
13. Once your dog is confident both to eat and to rest a little within the crate, close the crate door gently with your dog inside. It's best to do this while your dog is eating from a bowl of food, or chewing on a filled Kong®. Open the door again before the dog has finished the food.
14. Over several days, gradually increase the length of time that your dog spends inside the closed crate.

I don't have enough time for crate introduction. What should I do?

If your dog has been prescribed crate rest to start immediately, then you will need to compromise a little with the introduction process. The crate may need to be introduced over several hours rather than several days. Do nevertheless follow as many of the above steps as possible before closing the crate door with the dog inside. Crate-restricted dogs are usually safe to walk for at least a few steps at a time, but are not allowed to run or jump. For safety, have your dog on a harness and lead at all times while they sniff out the crate.

Even if crate rest must start the same day, do make a point of setting the crate up comfortably before showing it to your dog. In an emergency situation, crate contents can be made safe and comfortable using whatever is to hand, e.g. doormats and bathmats offer non-slip footing, and old towels or blankets make useful bedding.

Owners occasionally find themselves in the position of having to put their dog straight into the crate with almost no introduction period. For example, this may happen if your dog has just returned home in the evening after an emergency operation. Even in the immediate situation, you do need to set the crate up comfortably and safely before the dog goes into it, so let the veterinary staff know if you need a little more time— they may be able to postpone your dog's discharge from hospital until the next morning.

Go through the crate introduction steps as shown above if at all possible. However, if your dog is not interested in food due to illness, then you will not even be able to tempt them into the crate using food. If you are unlucky enough to find yourself in this situation, then the best that you can do is to set the crate up comfortably, then guide or lift your dog gently inside it, before closing the door gently. Remember that your dog will be put off the crate if their first experience of it is unpleasant, so avoid slamming the crate door, do keep your voice pleasant and kind and, even if you need to be quite firm with your dog, handle them with "kind" hands (avoid tight gripping, pushing and shoving).

What to do if your dog won't stop crying

If your dog cries and refuses to settle down in the crate, then do not immediately rush to comfort them. Otherwise, they will soon learn to make a noise to get your attention instead of resting contentedly.

Firstly, be sure that your dog's crate is comfortable with sufficient bedding, toys and water, and check that your dog is not sitting in a draught. For details on crate comfort, see "How to set up your

dog's recovery crate". If you need to approach the crate to make any changes, then aim to do this during a lull in your dog's crying if possible.

Recheck your dog's routine – have they been taken out to the toilet recently, and have they had a reasonable amount of attention from you already that day?

If the crying continues for no apparent reason, then do check on your dog now and again to be sure that they are safe. Keep your voice calm, quiet, and boring when checking on your dog, so as not to appear to "reward" them for the crying. If you have to check on your crying dog during the night, then keep the lights dim and your voice low. Your dog needs to learn not to expect attention at certain times of the day and night.

Food-dispensing toys such as Kongs® are useful for bored dogs. If your dog is restless then, instead of using a food bowl, consider feeding your dog's entire daily ration from food-dispensing toys to keep them occupied. Aim to offer the food or toys during a lull in the crying if at all possible. For more information on using food-dispensers, see "Toys".

Some owners do resort to sleeping in the same room as their crated dog for the first night or two. This is not always a good idea, as it can be difficult to get out of this routine once started.

If you are concerned that your dog cannot settle down, make an appointment to see your vet. They will be able to assess the whole situation, including checking that your dog is on sufficient painkiller medication. Bring along a photo of your crate set-up if possible as this gives useful information.

Why does my dog need a crate?

While recovering from injury or surgery, your dog's body is not yet strong enough to withstand some activities. A crate helps prevent your dog from running about, jumping on and off furniture and using the stairs. Each patient is different, so check with your vet as to exactly what your dog is and is not allowed to do. In most cases, the following activities are *not* allowed until late in recovery:

- Jumping (e.g. on or off furniture)
- Stairs
- Running
- Rough play with children or other dogs
- Playing with balls
- Walking on slick floors (this includes most wooden, laminate, tiled or linoleum floors unless they have a particularly grippy surface)

Your dog will certainly need to be left in their crate whenever you are out, asleep or busy. Whenever your dog leaves the crate, they need to be on the lead or carried (see p14-15) to prevent any rushing about. Dogs are creatures of habit, and they will instinctively move fast to jump onto an old favourite sofa, respond to a doorbell, or to play with another dog, even if their body is not yet strong enough to withstand this.

Keeping your crate-confined dog calm and content

- Make a regular daily routine for your recovering dog. This should include toilet breaks, exercise as prescribed by the vet, mealtimes, interactive “quality time” spent with you, and times of the day when your dog should learn not to expect any attention. Your dog will be less stressed if they know what to expect (see p16, “Daily routine for the crate-restricted dog”).
- Do provide a large enough crate or pen for your dog, and set it up as comfortably as possible. During recovery, your dog’s crate is his or her own little world for much of the day and night. Sufficient space and bedding will make a difference to your dog’s well-being, and some dogs will not settle down if they are positioned in a draught or are too hot or cold. For full details, see p9-13, “How to set up your dog’s crate”.
- Offer suitable toys to your dog. Food-dispensing toys are particularly useful (see p12-13, “Toys”).
- Do your best to stay positive whenever talking to or handling your recovering dog, even if you are having a bad day. This will make a big difference to your dog’s well-being, as our canine friends are quick to pick up on our emotions.
 - Speak kindly to your dog rather than snapping or shouting at them. To encourage your dog to wake up and come with you, try an upbeat, higher-pitched voice. Speak in a slower, more soothing tone to encourage your dog to calm down.
 - Always handle your recovering dog gently (have “kind hands”). Do your best to avoid gripping your dog rigidly, or digging your finger-tips into them, both of which can hurt and put your dog on edge. This goes for whenever you are helping your dog in or out of the crate, lifting them, doing prescribed massage or anything else. A gentle stroke over your dog’s shoulders is usually a good start to whatever else you need to do. Keep a harness on your dog at all times. You can then restrain your dog, if needed, by grabbing the harness rather than by grabbing the dog.
 - Whenever your dog does something good, reward them immediately by saying “good boy/girl” and, at the same time, offering a small food reward. This helps them learn to cooperate with you.
 - A simple firm “no” may occasionally be needed to make it clear that your dog has just done something unacceptable. Be sure to reward them as soon as they do the right thing.
 - Avoid punishing your dog during recovery as this is likely to lead to behavioural problems. Avoid hitting, tapping or shaking your dog, rattling their crate bars, slamming their crate door, shouting or ranting at them. Remember that your crate-confined dog cannot go off and hide from an angry owner. If you feel full of bottled-up frustration, it may be best to put your dog safely into or his or her crate and then leave the room until you have calmed down.
- Dog Appeasing Pheromone (DAP) is produced by mother dogs to make their pups feel more content and calm. The same chemical is available in synthetic form (currently sold as

Adaptil® in the UK) as a diffuser, spray or collar. Try getting a DAP diffuser and plugging this in very close to your dog's crate for its calming effects. In addition, DAP spray can be used on bedding within the crate to help your dog feel at home. The diffuser and spray appear to be more useful than the DAP collar during crate restriction.

- Some dogs appreciate a change of scene now and again. Even if your dog is only allowed to walk for five minutes at a time, this does not necessarily have to be within your own garden.
 - Consider getting a dog pushchair so that you can take your dog to the park or woods. Lift your dog out for their prescribed amount of timed lead exercise, then put them back in the chair to rest. They'll enjoy being allowed to sniff somewhere new. For safety, be sure to clip your dog's harness to the pushchair during use, and always keep a close eye on your dog.
 - If your dog is comfortable in the car, then consider driving them somewhere more interesting for one of their daily short lead walks. Remember not to get carried away and walk for too long. It is important that your dog stays safe on the journey. Lift them in and out of the car and be sure that they will not jump off, or fall from, a car seat. For travel, the best option is usually to put your dog into a travel crate containing plenty of bedding. Once your dog is safe to sit for extended periods, then they can travel safely on a seat while restrained with a travel harness.
- Some dogs enjoy playing gentle games with their owner during recovery. Remember to stick to your vet's safety guidelines during any game-play. For example, running, ball-play and rough play must be avoided. For suggested games suitable for most recovering dogs, see p17, "Quiet games for recovering dogs".
- Keep an eye on your dog to check how well they cope with "traffic" around their crate. Some dogs like to see, hear and smell what is going on at all times. Others get upset by the comings and goings of people and other dogs near their crate. Bear in mind that a crated dog cannot escape from the sound of family games or arguments. If household bustle and noise seems to be making your dog anxious, then consider moving the crate to a quieter part of the home, and/or partially covering it with a sheet or blanket.
- Consider leaving the radio or recorded music playing at certain times of the day to help your dog settle down. Try playing your usual favourite radio station if your dog is already familiar with this. Or consider using an audiobook (try one aimed at school age children), gentle classical music or soft reggae, as studies have suggested that each of these may have some calming effect on dogs. Remember that your confined dog cannot escape from noise, so set the music no louder than a gentle speaking volume.

How to set up your dog's recovery crate

What type of crate or pen should I get?

The crate or pen needs to be sturdy enough to withstand some knocks and chewing. A purpose-built metal or heavy-gauge wire structure is best.

If there is any possibility that your dog might try to climb out, then a closed-top crate is essential. These are sold as puppy crates, travel crates or recovery crates. Bear in mind that crates are generally unsuitable for larger breeds as they provide insufficient space for large dogs to lie fully-stretched out or to turn easily. Though some crates are suitable for large breeds for travel purposes, they do not provide enough space for the same dog during several weeks of recovery.

For those dogs that will definitely not jump or climb, an open-top dog pen becomes an option. These are sometimes sold as whelping pens. It is usually easier to access a dog in an open-top pen than in a closed-top crate, as you can open the door and step inside. Dog pens also tend to offer more floor space than crates.

However, it is essential that your dog does not attempt to jump out over the open sides of a pen as this will cause injury. If your dog is strong and wilful, then they may even be able to knock the pen over. A standard height for dog pen sides is 80cm. Pens suitable for both indoor and outdoor use are available with sides up to 170cm tall, though weight and cost increase with size.

If your dog is too big for a crate, but too bouncy for a pen, then room rest is probably a better option. Discuss this with your vet.

Most crates and pens have a raised "lip" at the exit, which is too high for smaller recovering dogs to step over. If you have the choice, opt for a crate with a floor level exit. Some owners remove the crate lip with a hacksaw, before filing the edges smooth and/or covering them with strong sticky tape. However, modifying the crate will void its guarantee and, in some cases, may make the crate less stable. If the crate does have a lip, then you will need to either guide your dog very safely and slowly over this obstacle every time they leave the crate, or lift them out.

When should I get the crate?

If possible, introduce your dog to the recovery crate sooner rather than later. This will help them to feel far more comfortable and relaxed during recovery (see p3-5, "Introducing your dog to their recovery crate").

If your dog is having a planned operation (e.g. cruciate ligament surgery), then ask your vet in advance as to whether a crate will be needed. This allows you to get hold of a crate at least a few days before the operation. You can then set it up as a comfortable little "home" for your dog, and start getting your dog used to it before the operation.

Of course, this might not be possible in an emergency situation. In that case, just get the crate as soon as you can.

What size of crate or pen should I get?

The crate needs to be big enough for your dog to lie fully-stretched out, to sit or stand facing in a choice of directions, to yawn and stretch, to turn easily, to eat, and to lick or chew at toys. For each

dog breed, recovery crates should therefore be much larger than puppy crates. Suggested sizes for a few breeds are shown in the table below.

Dog breed	Minimum recommended floor area during confinement	Crate, pen or room rest
Japanese chin, pug, Yorkshire terrier	70 x 100cm	Pen if dog will not attempt to jump★ Or crate of at least 40inches
Jack Russell terriers, Norwich terriers	75 x 105cm	Pen if dog will not attempt to jump★ Or crate of at least 42 inches (this size is often sold as “extra-large”, XL).
Cavalier King Charles spaniel	90 x 128cm	Pen if dog will not attempt to jump★ For small dogs of this breed, consider 48inch crate (XXL) For larger individuals, consider specialised giant crate ¥ Or room rest.
Springer Spaniel	105 x 140cm	High-sided pen if dog will not attempt to jump★ Large enough crates are not available. Room rest is often the best option.
Labrador	135 x 220cm	Room rest
Greyhound	130 x 220cm	Room rest

★ *Standard dog pens are available with sides of 80cm or 91cm high. Specialised pens suitable for indoor and outdoor use are available with sides up to 170cm high.*

¥ *At time of writing, the largest dog crate found advertised online has floor area of 137cm x 84cm.*

For the larger breeds, it is generally more practical to use a recovery room than a crate. Discuss this option with your vet.

Where should I put the crate?

Choose a position for the crate that will stay comfortable all day and all night. It needs to be placed away from draughts and out of direct sunlight.

If possible, put the crate into a room in which your dog has always liked to rest. Most dogs also prefer to be in an area of the house that is regularly used, so that they can see people coming and going now and again. However, if your confined dog seems to get upset by people or other dogs going past, then you may need to find a quieter spot. Bear in mind that your dog won't be able to escape from noisy family games or arguments.

It is best not to put the crate too close to the washing machine, tumble drier, TV or other machines, as the dog will not be able to escape from the noise or vibrations.

It is generally best to place the crate well away from radiators and heaters to prevent overheating.

However, if your dog loves warmth and always chooses to rest by a heat source then, in a cold house, you may consider putting one short end of the crate next to a fairly warm radiator. A small gap between crate and radiator will prevent burns. This gives your dog a chance to rest in a warm spot. The other end of the crate should feel noticeably cooler. If the crate is very small, then do *not*

place it next to a radiator as the dog will overheat. In any case, do watch your dog closely to start with. If he or she is panting, then move the crate to a cooler position. Always have fresh water available inside the crate.

If draughts around the crate are unavoidable, e.g. at night, then use blankets over or around the crate as insulation (see p12, “Extra bedding to stop draughts”).

What should I put in the crate?

Your dog will be inside the crate for nearly 24 hours per day, possibly for several weeks at a time. Do set the crate up as a pleasant home for your dog. If your dog is comfortable, then recovery will be easier.

Flooring

Many crates come with a removable plastic base that wobbles when stepped on. It’s best to remove and discard this base as it tends to be slippery, unpleasant to walk on and can even scare some dogs. In most crates, this will leave you with a wire mesh base which will need covering.

Do line the entire floor of the crate with non-slip matting. This is sold online by the metre by some flooring companies, and can be cut to fit the base of the crate. If the room has a slick floor, then buy extra matting to go outside the crate (see p14-15, “How can I keep my dog safe outside the crate”). Alternatively, rubber-backed “dust trapper” type mats, door mats, or cheap rubber anti-skid bath mats can be used. The non-slip surface will prevent bedding from sliding around, and will help your dog learn to stand and walk more safely and easily.

Some open-top pens will only stand up securely on a non-slip surface. A carpeted floor usually provides a good base for this type of pen. If the floor is not carpeted, then non-slip matting should be placed, and the pen set up on top of this.

Bedding

Soft bedding will keep your dog warmer and encourage them to rest. Include items that smell familiar to your dog if possible, as this will help him or her to feel at home.

Bedding for dogs that are able to get up and move about

This section applies to most dogs recovering at home, as long as they have some ability to get themselves up from a lying position.

Do provide a cushioned area large enough for your dog to lie on fully-stretched out. You could use your dog’s usual soft bed if this fits inside the crate. However, some dog beds have a raised edge which is too high to step over during recovery. A bed shaped like a flat pad is generally better. If you don’t have a dog bed available, then use either a folded quilt or blanket to create a soft lying area. A piece of Vetbed® placed on top will make the bed even nicer to lie on.

Most recovering dogs can stand at least a little. For comfort, the non-slip matting adjacent to their bed could be covered with Vetbed®, towelling, fluffy bath mats or even artificial turf. Be aware that some dogs will chew anything put into the crate, and that this could make them very ill. Keep a close

eye on your dog to start with, as items may need to be removed if your dog turns out to be a persistent chewer.

Bedding for dogs that cannot get up without help

A few dogs are unable to stand up unaided. For example, this is the case for some dogs recovering from severe trauma or spinal disease. For these animals, the entire base of the crate must be thickly padded to help prevent pressure sores. A flat block of high density foam is best. This can be bought cut to fit the base of the crate from online foam suppliers. Some suppliers will also make a cover for this type of pad.

In an emergency situation, a folded quilt or several layers of blankets could be used as the basis of bedding for a collapsed dog while foam bedding is unavailable.

On top of the padding, place a layer of Vetbed® or a towel for extra absorbency and softness. Have spares available in case of soiling. In addition, disposable incontinence pads can be placed directly under the dog if required.

If your dog is unable to stand, then he or she will need to be turned at least every four hours to help prevent pressure sores. Rolled or folded towels are sometimes useful for propping a dog into a comfortable position, and cushions or gel pads occasionally prove useful as extra padding. The needs of each patient are different, so ask your dog's vet or hospital discharge nurse for details on positioning, padding and turning.

Extra bedding to stop draughts

Do crouch down and check for draughts at dog level, particularly at night. You may need to tuck a blanket between the crate and the house wall to stop a draught. Some people wrap a cot bumper around the crate. Others find that their dog settles best if the crate is partly covered with a sheet or blanket. It is usually best to keep at least one side of the crate uncovered to allow for some airflow, and so that you can check on your dog.

Food and water bowls

Your dog needs fresh water available at all times. If a dog bowl might get knocked over, then opt instead for one that clips to the inside of the crate. For safety, choose a clip-on bowl that fits neatly against the crate wall and has no sharp projections.

Most crate-confined dogs eat all of their meals inside the crate. Food can either be put into a bowl or, to give the dog something interesting to do, it can be offered from food-dispensing toys such as Kongs®. Many owners use both methods, i.e. they offer a small amount of food from a bowl in the crate twice a day, plus they put filled Kongs® or other food-dispensing toy into the crate as extra mini-meals. For more about food-dispensing toys, see below under "Toys".

During recovery, some dogs do best with a raised food bowl though this is rarely essential. A raised food bowl helps the dog to keep a healthy posture while eating, e.g. following a cruciate or patellar (knee) operation. This type of bowl is also less likely to get knocked over inside the crate.

Toys

Dogs soon get bored in a crate, so you'll need to have a few toys ready as a distraction. It's best not to give all the toys to your dog at once, but to offer them in rotation. That way, they'll seem more interesting.

Though some dogs do enjoy soft toys, crated dogs particularly enjoy playing with objects that they can lick, chew, or get food out of. Most dogs love to work for food.

Hollow Kongs®, maze feeders and puzzle feeders are designed to release food gradually during play. Before filling these toys, do check how much your dog is allowed to eat per day. Daily food intake often needs to be reduced during recovery, so check with your vet if you're not sure. Measure the total ration out, setting some aside for later in the day. If your dog needs plenty to do, then you could offer the total daily food ration from food-dispensing toys (Kongs® or maze or puzzle-type feeders). Or you may prefer to divide the daily ration between toys and meals fed from a bowl.

Kongs® can be filled with kibble or tinned dog food. To avoid your dog chasing after pieces of scattered dry food, it's best to first soak the kibble in water for 30 minutes. You may also like to smear some of your dog's tinned food over the opening of the Kong® to seal in the filling.

To create a dog ice lolly, prepare the Kong® as described above, then place it into the freezer for at least two hours. Wipe it over with a warm damp cloth to prevent freezer burn before offering to your dog as a long-lasting treat.

Maze or puzzle-type feeders are usually designed to be filled with dog kibble. For the more complex puzzle feeders, you may need to help your dog initially by showing them how to release the food.

Don't be tempted to use peanut butter, cheese or other high calorie foods inside the food-dispensing toys. These are too fattening and may also lead to digestive upsets. If you want to add something extra to your dog's diet, then ask your vet to recommend suitable low-calorie dog treats. Carrot sticks or apple chunks can be hidden inside Kongs®, or consider boiling or microwaving carrot, apple or sweet potato to make a tasty puree with which to seal up your dog's Kongs®. There's no need to add milk, sugar or anything else. Fruit or vegetables should only be added to the diet very gradually, and be aware that some foods, including grapes, are unsafe for dogs and must not be fed.

Rawhide and other chews are further options for keeping your dog occupied. Be aware that all chews, including simple rawhide, contain plenty of calories, so they need to be factored into the dog's diet.

Tips on toy safety for recovering dogs:

- Choose hard-wearing toys designed for the size of your dog
- Avoid toys with squeakers or loose parts, in case your dog swallows or inhales these
- Dispose of damaged or broken toys promptly
- Avoid balls and other bouncing toys, as these are likely to cause leaping and chasing behaviour.
- Avoid rolling food-dispensers until very late in recovery as dogs like to chase these.
- Every time that you offer a new type of toy, watch your dog closely to start with to check that he or she is playing safely. If your dog starts to leap about with the toy or to chase it, then remove the toy until a later stage in recovery.

How can I keep my dog safe outside the crate?

The recovery crate or pen is designed to protect your dog from over-activity. You also need to know how to keep your dog safe outside the crate as, no doubt, you'll want to spend some quality time together each day. And, of course, your dog will need to leave the crate safely for regular toilet breaks.

Once again, the general rules during recovery are:

- No jumping (e.g. on or off furniture)
- No stairs
- No running
- No rough play with children or other dogs
- No playing with balls
- Avoid slick floors

So you need to help your dog avoid all the above whenever he or she is out of the crate. Recovering dogs must stay on the lead whenever outdoors. A fixed length clip-on lead is preferable. A lead that feels fairly soft in your hands will give you better control over your dog, and will be much more pleasant to use throughout your dog's recovery. Even if set to a short length, an extendable lead will not allow you to control your dog's speed easily, as the lead itself is not designed to be gripped with a hand, and the handle is unwieldy.

Whenever your recovering dog is outside their crate, they should either be on the lead, or carried in your arms. This ensures that they do not rush across the room or make a dash to jump onto the sofa.

A harness is far better than a collar during recovery, as it fits around the dog's centre of gravity and avoids the delicate neck structures. Harnesses with a "Y" shaped front are generally best. Designs with a "T" shaped front tend to constrict the dog's shoulders. Mekuti and Perfect Fit are two suggested brands, though others are available.

The top of the harness acts as a safety "grab handle". You can reach for this strap if your dog attempts to leap or if he or she starts to lose their footing at any stage. When sitting and relaxing with your recovering dog, do keep a gentle hold on the harness just in case your dog starts to run off unexpectedly (e.g. in response to the doorbell).

Some dogs get excited and attempt to rush out past their owner when the crate door is opened. This is a moment when accidents easily happen, so do be careful when opening the crate door. If your dog is in a large pen, then you should be able to step inside and close the pen door behind you, before picking your dog up or leading them carefully out. If using a closed-top crate, then you'll need to reach inside and get a careful hold of your dog before guiding them out. It is a good idea to leave the harness on your crated dog at all times. You then just need to get a hold of the top strap of the harness to steady your dog before lifting or guiding them safely out.

Slippery floors must be avoided during recovery. This includes most laminate, wooden, tiled or vinyl floors. Carpet is fine. If you floors are slick, then place enough non-slip matting to create a safe route from the crate to the outdoor toileting area, and wherever else your dog may need to access. For small dogs, another option is to carry your dog over any slick floors throughout recovery. In any case,

it is a good idea to place a piece of non-slip matting just outside the exit to the crate. This allows your dog to step out of the crate safely, even if you are then going to lift them.

Ensure that the route outdoors is step-free. Doorsteps and garden steps should be avoided initially for all dogs, and they may need to be avoided throughout recovery if your dog has short legs. If necessary, check with your vet as to what your dog is allowed to do. Your vet may be happy for you to walk your dog very slowly over a shallow step if restrained on a harness and lead.

If you must avoid steps and there is no step-free route out of the house, then either lift your dog or provide a ramp. However, any ramp must be well-secured, sturdy and non-slip. An improvised plank of wood is *not* a safe option. Consider using a canine car ramp or, for a long-term solution, get a carpenter to create a ramp to fit your space.

When walking your recovering dog on the lead, do walk very, very slowly. This helps your dog to use each paw properly and will help him or her to get better sooner. Your dog may think that it is easier to rush ahead with a limp (or even on three legs). Remind them to walk slowly and properly, otherwise the limp can easily become a habit.

If your dog has short legs (e.g. smaller terriers, dachshunds and any toy breeds) then you will have been used to them trotting or running next to you when out on walks together. During recovery, they should be walking, not trotting. This will feel very, very slow to you, so do be patient.

Daily routine for the crate-restricted dog

Help your dog recover by establishing a regular daily routine. If your dog knows what to expect, then he or she will feel that bit calmer. A regular routine can also help avoid practical problems involving sleep and toileting. The routine needs to work for you both, so organise timings around when you expect to be available. As far as possible, keep the routine the same on weekdays and weekends.

The routine needs to involve toilet breaks, feeding times and quiet times for rest. Later in recovery, your dog may also have a prescribed amount of walking to fit in each day, and perhaps some prescribed physiotherapy exercises. Make a point of spending some quality time with your dog at least once per day in addition to the above. This may involve just sitting together with them in front of the TV, or may involve grooming, quiet games, massage if you have been shown how to do this, etc.

Plan one or two quiet rest times of the day during which your dog should expect no interaction with you. These quiet rest times may each eventually be up to three to four hours long if your dog settles well into a crate rest routine, and will hopefully give you some opportunity to leave the house. From the start, schedule these quiet rest times for periods of the day when you are most likely to be absent or busy.

During at least the first week of crate rest, it is best to be available at home for your dog most of the time. Start the routine straight away, but do be patient with your dog as this is all new to them. Your dog will eventually start to expect certain activities at regular times of the day, so think ahead and organise a routine that should continue to work for you both.

A summary of what to include in your dog's daily routine:

- **Three to five outdoor sessions on the lead for toileting.** These toilet breaks should generally each be no longer than five minutes long to start with (follow your vet's advice). Most dogs will need to go out for toileting as soon as they wake up, last thing at night, and after each meal. Adjust this as needed to suit your dog. Your vet may ask you to increase the length of the outdoor sessions week by week until they become proper walks.
- **Two or more meals fed at regular times inside the crate.** Either offer your dog's main meals from a bowl or from food-dispensing toys.
- **One or two regular daytime resting periods** during which your dog learns not to expect to interact with you. These periods may eventually be up to three to four hours long if your dog settles down well.
- **At least one regular slot of "quality time" per day**, during which you spend positive time with your dog. This is your opportunity to stroke or groom your dog, to play safe quiet games, or just to sit together in front of the TV. (For safety, do remember to keep a hold on your dog's harness whenever he or she is relaxing with you!) If your dog has been prescribed physiotherapy exercises, massage, etc., then these can be included as "quality time". Some dogs love attention and will enjoy at least three sessions of owner interaction per day.
- **Regular evening bedtime**, after which the dog is left to sleep undisturbed in the crate.

Extra activities during crate-restriction

Quiet games for recovering dogs

All dogs in crates should be offered suitable toys (see “Toys”). If your dog is still bored and wants to interact with you, then consider getting his or her mind working with some quiet games. These must be chosen carefully for safety. Ball games are unsuitable during recovery, and obedience games involving the command “sit” are not safe following some operations, so do check with your vet if you are not sure.

Your dog needs to avoid bouncing around during recovery, so keep any games calm, keep your dog on a lead throughout each game, and reward your dog with praise and little food rewards, not with a rough and tumble session.

Here are two games that some recovering dogs like to play:

Indoor retrieval game, with your dog safely on a lead. Reward your dog when he or she brings an object to you – say “good boy/girl” and offer them a small food treat. Make this more interesting by naming two objects. For example, two of your dog’s toys may be “Kong” and “Green Duck”. Start to teach these to your dog by pointing and naming. Gradually, encourage your dog to retrieve the correct toy on request, e.g. you can say “fetch Green Duck”. Make it very simple to start with by only offering the correct toy. If your dog enjoys this, then make it more challenging by asking your dog to select the correct object out of two toys, and perhaps eventually from a selection of toys. Not all dogs have the knack of learning new words, so be patient with your dog, and remember that it is just a game.

Sniff & search game. Try teaching your dog some basic “nose work” to search for bits of kibble or low calorie dog-treats. Again, do this with your dog on the lead for safety. Start by dropping the food on the floor in front of your dog, say “Find it”, and encourage your dog to search for, and eat all the bits of food. Next, try dropping food on the floor out of your dog’s sight. Again, say “Find it”, and encourage them to search for, and eat, all of the food. To increase the challenge, hide bits of food under pieces of fabric, cardboard or upturned egg-boxes. Remember that food for this game must come out of your dog’s daily ration (i.e. measure what you are offering, and give them that bit less at dinner time).

Physiotherapy exercises

Exercises can help improve your dog’s strength, balance and coordination during recovery, plus they can be made into an interesting task for your dog to focus on.

Safety is key, and it is better for your dog to do no exercises at all than to do them badly. Always ask your vet before starting any exercises with your dog. They can refer you to a physiotherapist who can assess your dog, pick out appropriate exercises, and show you exactly what to do.

Your dog should wear a harness while doing any exercises. This allows you to adjust your dog’s position without pulling on his or her neck. It is also important for safety, as the top strap of the harness can act as a handy “grab handle” if your dog starts to lose balance.

During recovery, any exercises should be just within your dog's "comfort zone". For example, he or she might be asked to do gentle weight shifts, or to move in a controlled way between different natural positions.

Activities that would challenge a healthy dog, such as balancing on a wobbly object or stepping over raised obstacles, should be left until late in recovery or avoided altogether. If your clinician asks you to use equipment for home exercises, then be particularly careful. It is of course important that your dog does not slip or trip, and that equipment does not roll onto or fall onto your dog.

Massage for your dog

Some owners are asked to massage their dog during recovery, especially following spinal surgery. The idea of this is usually to improve blood flow, and to help your dog to recover normal sensation.

For some dogs and owners, this is a pleasure. However, if done incorrectly, massage can be uncomfortable and even painful for dogs. Similarly, "passive range of movement" exercises (moving your dog's legs around in a prescribed way) is not a good idea in some situations, and will be painful if performed incorrectly.

Only attempt massage or passive range of movement under professional guidance. Ask your clinician to show you exactly what to do by demonstrating on your own dog, then have them watch you try the same procedure in front of them and ask for feedback. If massage or passive range of movement have been prescribed, but they seem to cause your dog distress or discomfort at home, then stop and contact your clinician for advice. If necessary, ask your vet to refer you to a physiotherapist or rehabilitation clinician who can teach you what is required.

Staying positive during your dog's recovery

Keeping your recovering dog safe and comfortable is quite a challenge. Many owners feel frustrated at times when their dog has to be confined to a crate. If this applies to you, then you are not alone. Caring for yourself will benefit both you and your dog, as negative emotions easily pass from us to our canine friends.

Some tips to help you stay positive:

- Do start a regular routine for your recovering dog. Be sure to include particular times of the day when he or she should learn not to expect any interaction from you. Dogs need some rest time during the day, so don't feel guilty about this.
- Remember that quality time spent with your dog does not have to be time spent walking together.
 - If your dog has always chosen to come and sit with you, then make a point of simply relaxing quietly together at some point each day during recovery. You can sit together on the sofa if this is what your dog is used to, perhaps while reading or watching TV. Be sure to lift your dog safely on and off the sofa, and restrain them safely at all times: It will soon become second-nature to keep the fingers of one

hand tucked around one of your dog's harness straps just in case your dog has the impulse to jump or run.

- Physiotherapy exercises and prescribed massage can give you and your dog something good to focus on together each day. Ask your vet for referral to a physiotherapist who will be able to teach you what is required.
- Even if your dog is not allowed to walk far during recovery, do continue to make a point of getting plenty of fresh air and exercise yourself.
 - For smaller dogs, a dog pushchair is an option. Choose a design that can be used off-road, so that you can continue your own usual walking regime without over-exerting your dog. Lift your dog out of the pushchair for the few minutes of exercise that they are allowed.
 - In mild dry weather, you may be able to relax outdoors or do the gardening with your dog in an outdoor enclosure. This gives you both a chance to enjoy some fresh air. Some recovery crates and pens can be easily reassembled outdoors for temporary use on grass. Position the pen with one end in the shade, and be sure to have water available for your dog at all times.
- If you are feeling isolated, then consider joining an online support group for owners of recovering dogs. The dog-owning community is typically happy to welcome others into a group and to offer moral support. Practical tips may be offered on dog forums, but be aware that not all of these will be safe or relevant to your own dog, so always check with your vet before making any major changes to your dog's regime.
- Now and again, consider either getting a friend to take over dog-minding duties, or employing the services of a pet-sitter or dog-walker. Do go through exactly what is needed with them in advance though, as your dog's safety is important.
- Seek good practical support and advice early on. Your vet or surgeon should give you general home care guidelines for your dog's recovery, including "do's and don'ts", how much to walk your dog each day, and advice on diet. For further guidance, your vet can refer you to a physiotherapist or rehabilitation specialist who can help organise a safe daily routine for your dog from day one. If you are very concerned about your confined dog's behaviour, then ask your vet for advice and, if needed, consider requesting a referral to a rehabilitation or behavioural specialist sooner rather than later.

Summary

Choose a sturdy, purpose-built crate. An open-top dog pen can be used if your dog will definitely not try to escape.

The crate should be big enough for your dog to lie fully stretched out, to sit or stand facing in a choice of directions, to yawn and stretch, to eat, and to lick or chew at toys (see p9-10).

Choose a position for the crate that will stay comfortable all day and all night (see p10).

If possible, get the crate before it is really needed. Set the crate up comfortably with bedding, toys, food and water before showing it to your dog.

Introduce your dog to the crate gradually over several days (see p3-5).

Reward your dog for good behaviour with praise and small food rewards. Avoid punishing your dog during recovery.

Cover the base of the crate with non-slip matting. Bedding is put on top of this. See p10-11.

For safety, cover any slick floors with non-slip matting.

Choose hard-wearing chewable toys for your recovering dog. Food-dispensing toys such as filled Kongs® are particularly good as boredom-busters.

Most recovering dogs must avoid running, jumping, stairs, ball play, rough play and slick floors. Check with your vet as to what your own dog is allowed to do.

A harness is better than a collar during recovery. A harness with a Y-shaped front is best. See p14. You will also need a fixed-length lead.

When opening the crate door, take care that your dog does not try to run out past you. If you leave the dog with a harness on at all times, then its top strap can act as a safety "grab handle".

Keep your fingers tucked into the harness while sitting and relaxing with your dog outside the crate.

Whenever outside the crate, your dog must be either carried, or on a lead.

Walk very slowly when your dog is on the lead. This helps your recovering dog to use each paw properly.

Make a regular daily routine for your recovering dog (see p16). The routine should include toilet breaks, feeding times, some quality time spent with you, and quiet times for rest.

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