

Room rest: Advice for dog owners

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

It is best to get the recovery room ready ahead of time so that your dog has the chance to get used to it gradually (see p6). If you are just getting started, then we recommend that you first read "Choosing a suitable room for recovery?" on p2. You may also find the "Recovery room shopping list" useful (see p5). There is a summary of key points on p21. Keep the rest of this guide to hand for reference. For example, "How to set up your dog's recovery room" explains how to make your dog's recovery space as comfortable as possible.

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Why does my dog need a recovery room?

While recovering from injury or surgery, your dog's body is not yet strong enough to withstand some activities. Confining your dog to a suitable room will help prevent them 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 very 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 recovery room whenever you are out, asleep or busy. Whenever your dog leaves this room, they need to be on the lead or carried (see p15) 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.

Choosing a room suitable for recovery

The ideal recovery room may be a ground floor "spare room", study or boot room, with no furniture to jump on, and with easy outdoor access. However, you need to work with the space available to you. It may be practical to adapt a fairly small living or dining room so that it works well as a recovery space for your dog.

The recovery room must be on a single level (i.e. no access to steps or stairs). Your dog will go outdoors for toileting several times a day, so will also need a step-free route from their room to the outdoors. Opt for a ground floor room unless you're happy to carry your dog indoors and out each time.

It is essential to find a way to prevent your dog from jumping onto furniture during recovery (this includes sofas, chairs, beds, etc.). If a furniture-free room is not available, then you may need to consider moving furniture elsewhere during your dog's recovery. Some owners block access to sofas and chairs by placing boards or other barriers across them. This can occasionally work, but is generally not advisable as there is a high risk of injury if your dog tries to cross the barriers.

Choose a room that is small enough to discourage running, but with enough floor space for your dog to lie fully-stretched out, to eat and drink, to walk a little and to turn easily.

If possible, choose a room in which your dog has always liked to rest so that they feel at home. Most dogs also prefer to be in an area of the house that is regularly used rather than being shut away in a utility room.

Consider who else will access the room, and whether this will be a problem. People need to open the door with great care each time to prevent your dog from rushing out, so bear this mind if choosing a family room. Access to other pets may also cause trouble. During recovery, your dog must not rush about with other dogs, and must of course not attempt to chase the cat.

Choose a room which you can maintain at a comfortable temperature. This is about 17°C to 21.5°C (62.5°F to 71°F) depending on what conditions your dog is used to. On the one hand it is dangerous for dogs to overheat. On the other hand, your dog will not rest comfortably if left in a room that is much colder than their usual sleeping place. For dogs accustomed to sleeping indoors, this makes unheated outbuildings unsuitable in cool climates.

If possible, avoid shutting your dog in the same room as washing machines, tumble driers or other machinery, as they will not be able to escape from the noise and vibrations.

If putting your dog somewhere new, remember to prevent access to harmful chemicals. Some dogs will eat or chew everything that they can get to, and some are perfectly capable of opening cupboards if given half a chance. Cleaning products, garden or DIY chemicals, paints and packets of medicines or supplements are all potentially toxic and must be kept well out of reach.

Many dogs enjoy looking out through a window while resting. If glazing extends down to floor level, then this will give your dog a view outdoors. This is good, so long as the activities of wildlife and other pets are not going to cause your dog to jump about with excitement. A room with a low window or patio doors is likely to be draughty: do provide plenty of bedding to create a warm sleeping spot.

Recovering dogs are generally not supposed to stand up on their hind legs (check with your vet regarding your own dog's activity restrictions). They should therefore be discouraged from standing up at a window with their front paws on the sill. If this is a problem, then consider keeping the curtains drawn, hanging temporary blinds or sheeting to cover the window, or choosing a different room.

The floor of the recovery room must have some grip to it. Carpet makes an ideal walking surface. If the floor is slick, then you will need to cover it with non-slip matting (see p12).

Stairgates are used by some owners to zone off a living space for the use of a recovering dog. If there is any possibility that your dog may attempt to jump over the barrier, then do not attempt this. Most stairgates are only 75cm tall, which is even lower than the 80cm sides of standard dog pens. Extra-tall stairgates are available at 91cm tall. It is even more risky to use unfixed barriers in an attempt to divide up a space (e.g. fireguards) as these are of course easily knocked over.

Is there a better option than room rest?

For larger dogs, room rest is usually the best option during recovery. However, some homes do not have a room that is suitable for a recovering dog. The other main options are a recovery crate or indoor dog pen. In order to come up with the best possible solution, consider the type of space available in your home, as well as the size and personality of your dog. Do discuss any concerns with your vet, if possible well *before* any operation.

Crates do not offer enough floor space for larger dog breeds to lie fully-stretched out or to turn easily. The largest crates offer only up to about 125x75cm of floor space. Head space in crates is too low for many large dogs. Few crates come taller than 84cm, a height which will just graze the top of the head of some Labradors in a sitting position.

Some crates are sold as being suitable for giant breeds. These may be fine for travel purposes, but do not provide enough space for the same dog during several weeks of recovery.

Dog pens 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 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, but pens suitable for both indoor and outdoor use are available with sides up to 170cm tall. Pens with 170cm sides should prevent almost any dog from escaping but, being heavy and expensive, they are rarely used within homes. However, they may be a useful solution for some dogs.

Table 1 gives some idea of the *minimum* floor area required by dogs of a few breeds. This may help you decide whether a crate or pen could be used instead of room rest.

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.

Recovery room shopping list

Your dog will be inside the recovery room 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 room up as a pleasant home for your dog.

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

- Unless the floor is carpeted, you will need non-slip matting to cover as much of the floor as possible. You may also need extra non-slip matting to extend from the recovery room 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
- Standard or raised water bowl
- 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: old blankets 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 large enough for your dog to lie on when fully stretched out. This can be sourced 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 recovery room

Top tips:

- ✓ If possible, choose a room in which your dog already likes to rest.
- ✓ Make the room safe and comfortable before showing it to your dog.
- ✓ If your dog is to be shut into an unfamiliar room during recovery, use a gradual step-by-step process to introduce it to them over a few days.
- ✓ Handle your dog gently while introducing their recovery room, and keep your voice kind and positive.
- ✓ Food can be used to tempt your dog into the room. But take care not to exceed your dog's daily food ration.

Dogs are quick learners, and they will soon learn to hate being confined if their first experience of this is unpleasant. It is best to introduce your dog to their new situation gradually and carefully. Of course, pushing a dog into a room and then slamming the door closed will make them anxious and lead to future behavioural problems.

Remember that dogs are quick to pick up on our emotions so, whatever happens, do your best to keep your voice positive and kind. Shouting at your dog, or rough handling, will make them anxious about being confined.

Your dog will be more inclined to settle down in the recovery room if the space has been made comfortable with plenty of bedding (see p12). Be sure to check for draughts at floor level, and to block these off with extra blankets if needed. It may also help to plug in a DAP diffuser close to your dog's new sleeping area, and possibly also to spray the bedding with DAP spray. These products can be obtained through most vet clinics (see p10 for more information).

Feed your dog his or her meals in the recovery room. This will help them to feel more confident and settled within that space. It's also a good idea to offer them something good to chew on, e.g. a filled Kong® (see p14 for details). However, when using food and treats to boost your dog's confidence, be careful not to start overfeeding. 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 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.

Introducing your dog to the recovery room ahead of time

If your dog has an operation scheduled for a few days' time, then set the recovery room up as soon as possible. Use those few days to get your dog used to eating and resting in the recovery room, keeping its door wide open to start with.

Once your dog has both eaten a meal and laid down to rest in the recovery room, then you can try closing the door for a short time with your dog alone in the room. The best time to try this is while your dog is eating a bowl of food or chewing on a filled Kong®. Open the door again after a couple of minutes.

Over the next few days, gradually increase the length of time that your dog spends alone in the room with the door closed.

Stepwise process: Getting a dog used to being alone in a new room

It is best not to shut your dog into a totally unfamiliar place (e.g. a utility room) if at all possible. However if this is unavoidable, then it is best to introduce your dog to confinement very gradually. Otherwise, they are likely to become anxious and not settle down.

Approach this as a step-by-step process (see below). Give your dog some bits of food to seek within the room. This makes the whole process far more positive and fun.

Some dogs gain confidence from seeing their owner sitting in the room for at least a few minutes at a time. Rather than just standing in there with your dog, try sitting yourself down on a floor cushion or beanbag, e.g. to read a book.

Suggested steps of the introduction process are listed below. Bear in mind that every dog is different, and that some are quicker to relax in a new room 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 room is comfortable enough, before going back and repeating the earlier steps.

1. Make the room as comfortable as possible. Cover the floor with non-slip matting, and then put down plenty of bedding (see p14). Put your dog's favourite toys inside the room.
2. Optional: Plug in a DAP (Adaptil®) diffuser as close as possible to your dog's bed. Spray the bedding with DAP spray. (see p10)
3. Scatter bits of your dog's dry food *or* small dog treats widely over the floor of the room
4. Prop the door wide open.
5. Pick a time when you expect your dog to be hungry. Put your dog onto a lead, and walk with them into the room. If your dog hesitates at the entrance, then point into the room with your free hand, and say "Come on, this way!"
6. Allow your dog to explore inside the room on the lead, to sniff out some of the food and to eat it.
7. Before the scattered food is used up, walk with your dog out of the room (point and say "Come on, this way!" again if needed). Then turn your dog around and walk back into the room, and let them continue searching for the bits of food.
8. Give your dog a break, and let them go elsewhere in the house.
9. The next day, repeat steps 4-8.
10. With the door still propped open, offer your dog a bowl of food or a filled Kong® inside the room.
11. While your dog is eating, sit down in the room for a few minutes so that your dog can see that you are relaxed in there (e.g. sit and read).
12. Over the next few days, feed your dog more meals or filled Kongs® in the recovery room. As your dog gains in confidence from one mealtime to the next, go through steps a-e:
 - a. To start with, stay in the room while your dog eats, and keep the door *open*.
 - b. Next step is to stay in the room while your dog eats, but with the door *closed*.
 - c. Next step is to stay in the room while your dog eats, but to walk to the door, open it, then sit back down with the door open.

- d. Next step is to leave the room for a minute or so while your dog is eating. Keep the door open. Only walk out of the room once your dog has started eating. Go back in before they have finished the food.
 - e. The next step is to leave the room for a minute or so while your dog is eating. This time close the door behind you. Go back in before your dog is expected to have finished the food. It's best not to make too much fuss of your dog when you walk in.
13. Over several days, gradually increase the length of time that your dog spends inside the room with the door closed.
- a. To start with, only leave your dog in there while they are eating.
 - b. Once your dog is very relaxed in the room, you can walk out even when your dog is not eating.

If your dog is not interested in food (perhaps due to illness), then you will not be able to use treats or meals to tempt them into the room. In this case, adjust the step-by-step process to suit your dog, e.g. start by sitting in the room with your dog for long periods, and gradually reduce the time that you spend in the room with your dog.

I don't have enough time to introduce my dog to the recovery room. What should I do?

If your dog has been prescribed room rest to start *immediately*, then you may need to compromise a little with the introduction process. To make things easier, choose a room already familiar to the dog if at all possible. If you have to opt for an unfamiliar room, then do follow as many of the above steps as possible before closing the door with the unaccompanied dog inside. If short of time, you may need to go through the steps over several hours rather than several days.

Your dog won't be allowed to run in this situation, so omit any steps that involve leaving your dog in the room with the door open (just in case they rush past you through the open door).

Even if room rest must start the same day, do make a point of setting the room up comfortably before showing it to your dog. In an emergency situation, room 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.

Remember that your dog will be put off their recovery space if their first experience of it is unpleasant, so avoid slamming the 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, 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 room is comfortable with sufficient bedding, toys and water, and check that your dog is not sitting in a draught. For further details, see p12-14. If you need to enter the room 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 confined 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 the recovery room if possible as this gives useful information.

Helping your dog stay happy and content during recovery

- 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 p17).
- Choose the room carefully (see p10), and set it up as comfortably as possible. During recovery, this room becomes your dog’s 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 p12-14.
- Offer suitable toys to your dog. Food-dispensing toys are particularly useful (see p14).
- 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, or shouting or ranting at them. Remember that your recovering 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 his or her room and step away from the situation 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 sleeping area for its calming effects. In addition, DAP spray can be used on bedding to help your dog feel at home. The diffuser and spray appear to be more useful than the DAP collar during room rest.

- 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 garden.
 - If your dog is not too large, consider getting a dog pushchair so that you can continue trips 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 p18, "Quiet games for recovering dogs".
- Keep an eye on your dog to check how well they cope with "traffic" through and around their recovery room. 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. Bear in mind that a room-restricted 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 rethinking the location of the recovery room.
- 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 room

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

Flooring

Non-slip flooring is essential for safety following any operation or injury. Flooring with some grip to it will also help to strengthen your dog's muscles, especially during recovery from cruciate or patellar surgery.

Carpet makes an ideal walking surface. If the floor is not carpeted, then cover it with non-slip matting. This is sold online by the metre by some flooring companies, and can be cut to fit as required. Include a piece of matting underneath your dog's bedding. This will prevent the bedding from sliding around and will therefore help your dog learn to rise to a standing position more safely and easily.

Some owners cover part of the floor with either newspaper or incontinence pads in case their dog needs to pee unexpectedly. So long as the dog is taken outdoors for regular toilet sessions, then this is not usually necessary. If you do opt to put down paper or pads, ensure safe footing by putting non-slip matting directly underneath. Otherwise the paper or pads will slip about when stepped on.

Bedding

Soft bedding will keep your dog warmer and encourage them to rest. Dogs that have always rested on the sofa or bed are sometimes unwilling to sleep on the floor because it feels too cold and exposed. Offer ample bedding and block any draughts so as to help your dog feel happier at floor level.

Include items that smell familiar to your dog if possible, as this will help him or her to feel at home.

Even if your dog has always chosen to sleep on a cold, hard floor, it is sensible to offer plenty of soft bedding during recovery.

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. 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. For those dogs who are used to sleeping on the bed or sofa, a quilt placed on the floor makes a particularly inviting resting place. A piece of Vetbed® placed on top will make this 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 in the room, 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. The ideal bed for these dogs is a high density foam mattress. This should be long and wide enough to offer enough space for your dog to lie fully stretched out in a lying position. Opt for a mattress that is as thin as possible while still providing enough support. Once your dog is able to stand and walk, you want them to be able to step on and off the bed without too much difficulty. Suitable foam can be bought from online foam supplier, who should be able to cut and cover it to your specification.

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

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 blankets between your dog's resting place and the house wall to stop a draught.

Food and water bowls

Your dog needs fresh water available at all times. All meals should also be offered inside the recovery room. 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 room twice a day, plus they put filled Kongs® or other food-dispensing toy into the room as extra mini-meals. For more about food-dispensing toys, see below under "Toys".

During recovery, some dogs do best with raised food and water bowls, though this is rarely essential. Raised bowls help 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 in a small room.

Toys

Dogs soon get bored while confined to one room, 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, confined 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.
- 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 recovery room?

The recovery room helps to protect your dog from over-activity. You also need to know how to keep your dog safe outside the room. At the very least, you will of course take your dog outdoors 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 outside the recovery room.

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 indoors but outside their room, they should either be on the lead, or carried in your arms. This ensures that they do not rush about 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 door to their recovery room is opened. This is a moment when accidents easily happen, so do be careful when opening the door. It is a good idea to leave the harness on your recovering dog at all times. You then just need to get a hold of the top strap of the harness to steady your dog before attaching a lead and guiding them safely out.

Your dog will need to get outdoors for toileting without walking over slippery floors. Most laminate, wooden, tiled or vinyl floors are too slick for safety. 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.

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 recovering 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 include 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 room 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 room 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 recovery room.** 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 recovery room.

Extra activities during the room rest period

Quiet games for recovering dogs

All dogs on room rest should be offered suitable toys (see p14). 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 and at a slow walking pace 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 one room. 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. If your dog is too large to be lifted, then sofa time is not an option during recovery. In that situation, consider sitting and relaxing next to your dog on the floor.

- 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.
 - Sit outside with your dog now and again. For safety, keep a hold of your dog's harness or lead just in case they decide to run off.
 - 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. You'll need a pen or crate large enough for your dog. Most crates and dog pens can be put outdoors for a short time in dry weather, though only the zinc-coated ones are fully weatherproof. 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

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.

The recovery room must be on one level and, unless you are going to lift your dog in and out, the room needs step-free access to the outdoor toilet area.

Your dog must not jump on furniture in the recovery room. Remove any armchairs, beds, sofas etc. if needed, or choose a different room.

Your dog will settle down better if you choose a room in which they are already used to relaxing.

If possible, get the recovery room ready ahead of time. This allows your dog to get used to it gradually.

Introduce your dog to the recovery room gradually over several days (see p6).

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

Unless the recovery room is carpeted, cover its floor with non-slip matting. If needed, also put down non-slip runners to cover the route through the house to the outdoor toilet area.

Choose hard-wearing chewable toys for your recovering dog. Food-dispensing toys such as filled Kongs® are particularly good as boredom-busters (see p14).

A harness is better than a collar during recovery (see p15). The type of harness with a Y-shaped front is generally best. You will also need a fixed-length lead.

Take care that your dog does not try to run out past you when the door of the recovery room is opened. 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 recovery room, your dog must be carried, restrained safely by your side, 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 p17). This routine should include toilet breaks, feeding times, some quality time spent with you, and quiet times for rest.

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