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Pet owners turn to rehab for their four-legged friends

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Age may be taking the bounce out of your dog's step, but he doesn't have to live his final years hobbling around in pain.

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Whether it's age or injury-related, the road to recovery starts on all four legs.

Somewhere in all that doggie talk, your pup may be trying to tell you that he is in pain. Whether it is from arthritis, torn ligaments, or pinched nerves, dogs ache just like we do. □

Now, some pet owners are turning to rehab to ease the pain.

Pooling their expertise, veterinarian Jessica Waldman and physical therapist Amy Kramer put injured and aging pets back on their paws.

"People want better care for their pets. They want their pets not to be in pain," explains Amy Kramer, therapy director at California Animal Rehabilitation.

At the clinic, one pet works to rehab an elbow fracture in a warm water treadmill. Another does balance work to strengthen its back and joints.

Charlie learns to use his feet again after a neurological disorder paralyzed him.

"His initial recovery, he could hardly stand, but he could stand. Now, he can walk up a flight of stairs," explains Stephen Shikes, Charlie's owner.

Twelve-year-old William just wants to jump up on the bed again. Arthritis slows him down.

"Mobility shouldn't be the reason why a pet's life should end. It should be because they get something we can't cure," says veterinarian Dr. Jessica Waldman.

Stretching, strengthening, and conditioning work for us, so why not for pets?

"I just see a big difference all the way around, and most people can't tell how old he is, and he's

almost 12," explains Stacie Slater, William's owner.

When you're pushing 80 in human years, the paws don't move like they once did. But each step brings back a bit of the puppy William once was.

Dr. Waldman says too much fat is one of the major causes of joint pain in pets.

About 95-percent of pets who come to the clinic are overweight.

An eight-week program with twice-a-week treatments costs about \$2,000, which includes a two-hour consultation with a vet.

PET REHAB REPORT #1575

BACKGROUND:

Animals can experience the same aches and pains that humans do. Some common ailments that may affect pets include the following:

- Arthritis or dysplasia
- Spinal disorders
- Disc problems, neck or back pain
- Pre- or post-operative pain
- Muscle strains, spasms, weakness
- Tendonitis, ligament tears or sprains

PET REHAB:

Today, some centers around the country are offering rehabilitation services for animals.

"Rehabilitation means helping a pet regain function, whether it be mitigating pain, increasing range of motion or enhancing limb use," Amy Kramer, PT, DPT, CCRT, therapy director at California Animal Rehabilitation in Santa Monica, Calif., said.

"Combining veterinarian care with a physical therapist's understanding of exercise biomechanics, joint and soft tissue mobilizations, and proper use of modality equipment has shown positive results." In fact, pet owner exit surveys taken after an initial eight-week treatment program showed a 99-percent satisfaction rate at the California facility. The owners also reported an average 75-percent improvement with their pet's physical problems.

Pets come to the facility for treatment about twice a week, and pet owners are taught how to perform core exercises with their animals at home.

SERVICES:

Some specific types of rehabilitation for pets include:

- Manual therapy: range of motion, massage, stretching, joint mobilization
- Hydro-therapy: underwater treadmill and swimming
- Therapeutic exercises: balance, weight-bearing, strengthening, conditioning
- Acupuncture: dry needle, electro-acupuncture, aquapuncture
- Gait training: cavaletti poles, limb-use focus, best physiologic gait
- Home exercise programs
- Nutritional programs for weight loss
- Laser therapy

COST:

At California Animal Rehabilitation, the cost for an eight-week, twice-a-week treatment program runs about \$2,000. This amount also includes a two-hour initial consultation with a veterinarian.

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