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LIFE AND ARTS, SANTA MONICA, PETS

CARE When Your Pet Needs It

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What do you do when your spry and seemingly healthy dog starts limping? Well first you check his paws to see if he has a burr stuck in there. When that's all clear and he still won't put any weight on his leg it's time for a trip to the vet. When the vet checks him out and can't come up with a diagnosis they send you to the orthopedic specialists. When the specialists can't find anything wrong they send him home with pain pills and anti-inflammatory medications.

Then three months go by and the specialists still don't have an answer. Meanwhile, your active pooch hasn't walked in three months, is depressed, and his muscles have atrophied. Then he stops eating. Yikes.

Here's where the story starts to turn around: I was introduced to California Animal Rehabilitation (CARE). My vet suggested that they might help make my dog, T-bone, more comfortable. Walking (or limping in T-bone's case) into CARE was a gift. CARE is a state-of-the-art physical therapy facility where cutting edge Western and Eastern medicine work in concert.

First I met Dr. Jessica Waldman who is a veterinarian, a certified veterinary acupuncturist and a certified canine rehabilitation therapist. I told her the whole sad story and yet after three months of tests he was diagnosed with a staph infection. I could tell she was wondering if something else was also occurring.

I was also introduced to Amy Kramer, Waldman's partner who is a physical therapist as well as a certified canine rehabilitation therapist. They opened CARE in Santa Monica in 2007 and have helped many animals, with a variety of ailments, get more comfortable and often return to their normal level of energy prior to their illness or injury.

Kramer and Waldman realized that the unique collaboration of physical therapist and veterinarian would provide the gold standard in care. According to Waldman, "Veterinarians need to be part of the rehabilitation process because they know the medical issues-like in T-bones' case."

Kramer was already a human physical therapist when her dog got injured. That's when she became certified in canine rehabilitation.

"I knew that I wanted to apply my knowledge of physical therapy to animals but not knowing animal medicine, it made sense to do it in conjunction with a veterinarian. Combining the knowledge of the two professionals and having us both certified in canine rehabilitation allows us to offer the most comprehensive treatment and thus achieve the best outcome. In fact, any vet or physical therapist professional doing rehabilitation should be required to be certified in canine rehabilitation."

They examined T-bone and started him on a physical therapy program twice a week that would help loosen his stiff joints that had quickly become arthritic, as well as increase muscle tone. They, along with the other veterinarians, physical therapists, and assistants at CARE offered the most comprehensive care for my dog. One day a week he would do agility courses, get manual therapy, and do hydro-therapy in an underwater treadmill. It took a little bit of getting used to, but the staff was



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patient and before long T-bone was a pro. The opposite day he would have acupuncture, which reduces pain and inflammation, along with laser and heat or ice therapy.

Moreover, as I mentioned, T-bone was not eating when we first began therapy at CARE. One of Waldman's specialties is nutrition and she showed me how to cook balanced meals that were not only nutritious for T-bone, but also food that he enjoyed. Yes, cooking is more work, but when your baby isn't eating and you can easily feed him nutritious food, you do it.

T-bone seemed to be improving but then one night he tried to walk up the stairs at home and just collapsed. Fortunately I had an appointment for a check-up with Waldman the next day. She very calmly in her genius Zen-vet voice said, "I think there's more going on here than the diagnosis you were originally given." She sent us immediately for follow-up care and confirmed her suspicions – he has an autoimmune disease.

As I said earlier, things turned around for T-bone. The treatment however, for his autoimmune disease was high doses of prednisone, which increased his appetite (good thing) but gave him some awful side effects (not so good). His muscles atrophied, his mouth rotted (and you thought your dog had bad breath...) and his fur came out in clumps. Plus his paws and pads were cracked and tender and walking was uncomfortable. More than ever we needed CARE to keep T-bone comfortable and mobile.

Between the brilliance of Waldman, Kramer, and the care from their staff, T-bone got stronger. He was weaned from prednisone and is now on another drug that keeps his symptoms at bay.

CARE offers treatment for a variety of issues. T-bone's autoimmune disease is just one of them. Much of what they do is rehabilitation for a wide range of orthopedic ailments. They see a lot of ligament tears, car accident victims, and aging-pet issues such as hip and elbow arthritis, neck and back pain, and obesity patients. CARE treats all breeds, ages, and sizes of dogs, cats, and once even a rabbit.

They are a full-service facility and will watch your pet round the clock, or board them if you are traveling. CARE also works with local rescues and helps find them permanent loving homes while undergoing rehabilitation.

I can't recommend CARE enough. They will work with your pet onsite or if your pocketbook doesn't allow, they can give you treatments to do at home. Whether you think it's something minor, just old age, or even if it is something big, make the appointment for a consultation.

For more information, please visit CalAnimalRehab.com

Diane Rose-Solomon is a Certified Humane Education Specialist. Please visit her website Save Our Pets People and Planet www.sop3.com.

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