

Three Legs & a Spare



A Canine Amputation
Handbook from

tripawds[®]
.com



By René Agredano and Jim Nelson
With the Help of the Tripawds Community

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DISCLAIMER: We (The Authors) are not veterinarians. All information provided herein is based only on our own experiences caring for our dogs Jerry and Wyatt, and the experiences of other Tripawds community members. This information is not a substitute for medical care by a qualified veterinary professional. Always seek the advice of a licensed veterinarian prior to making any medical decisions for your dog or undergoing any treatments or therapies, or if you have questions about your dog's health. We advise against any medical decisions made without the direct involvement of your veterinary team, and you should never delay treatment nor disregard medical advice based on something you read in this e-book or online at Tripawds.com.

We do not guarantee that the information presented here will extend your dog's life, ensure a successful surgical procedure, or promote a complete recovery from amputation and cancer care. There is absolutely no assurance made of any outcome whatsoever. Neither safety nor efficacy is stated nor implied, directly or indirectly. Tripawds.com, is a project of Agreda Communications. René Agredano and Jim Nelson are not responsible or liable, directly or indirectly, for any form of damages whatsoever resulting from the use (or misuse) of information contained in or implied by the information available at Tripawds.com or within the pages of this electronic document.

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About this Book

This is an interactive PDF eBook. Entries in the Table of Contents above are linked directly to the pages referenced. Highlighted text links will load more information online. Buttons for these Contents and the [Tripawds discussion forums](#) can be found on every page.

Iconography

The following icons identify noteworthy content:

-  Important Information
-  Tripawds Book Review
-  Tripawds Blog Post or Other Website
-  Tripawds Discussion Forum Topic
-  Video ([Jerry G. Dawg Channel](#))

Overweight Dogs

Although overweight dogs probably have the biggest challenge when it comes to getting along on three legs, Tripawds resident vet [Dr. Pam Wiltzius says](#) “Most overweight dogs do fine as tripawds as long as their other joints are relatively stable.”

But that doesn't mean a dog should stay overweight. Because a Tripawd will need to use his body differently than other dogs, it's critical that he stays slender, almost underweight, in order to reduce the stress on his joints. Pawrents must be vigilant about cutting back on food to make life on three legs easier. We have been told by pain management specialist, Dr. Robin Downing of Windsor, Colorado, that a Tripawd should be about a 3.5 on the [canine body condition scale](#).

Recommended Reading



[Understanding Your Dog's Body Condition](#)

Canine Body Weight Considerations Explained



[HELP, need advice about amputation for overweight dog](#)

New Tripawds member seeks advice regarding amputation

Giant Breeds

Many vets are quick to dismiss giant breed dogs as suitable candidates for amputation. But just check out the stories of [three legged Irish Wolfhound Finnegan](#) and [English Mastiff Tripawd Tazzie](#). In the Tripawds [Giant Breeds photo gallery](#) you can also see examples of other giant breed dogs who have done well on three legs.

Our first Tripawd hero, and the inspawration for the website, was a [Great Dane named Moose](#), who had been living with osteosarcoma for almost a year when I was diagnosed. If any dog defies the stereotype of what a giant breed dog is capable of, it is Moose, the Wonder Dane.

Recommended Reading



[Gentle Giant Cemil Beats the Odds After Cancer](#)

Anatolian Shepherd's story, Cancer Diet and Supplements Regimen

Senior Dogs

Some people think that when a dog is nearing the end of his projected life span, amputation recovery will rob him of any precious time left. But pawrents need to remember that no matter what the age of the dog, the pain associated with any condition requiring amputation is typically worse than the pain of recovery itself. And even if a dog has osteosarcoma and his life expectancy is projected to be short, amputation means that those last precious months on earth are spent pain-free.



Jerry meets Finnegan



[Watch Tazzie's Video](#)



[See Finnegan in Action](#)

If age is the only thing holding you back from amputation – and your vet believes your dog is a good candidate – consider that as long as a dog is in overall good health, even older pups can recuperate without problems.

We've seen some wonderful examples of senior Tripawds:

- Cherry — [A Senior Dog's Tripawd Journey](#)
- Sami — [The 14 Year Old Senior Tripawd](#)
- Calpurnia — [15 Year old Three Legged Senior Sled Dog](#)
- Olive — [Super Senior Dogs](#)

And here is an excerpt from a forum discussion where pawrents of [senior tripawds shared their experiences](#) with a member who was undecided about amputation.

“Miss Cherry turned eleven the day before her amputation and that is very senior by Standard Poodle measurements. She had significant other issues at the time, but for me it was an easy decision. The amputation would eliminate the pain immediately, and the chemotherapy would provide the chance for a longer turn.”

Do not let the age deter you from doing what you feel is best, for everyone here will tell you that with extremely few exceptions, they recover from the amputation very quickly and can enjoy an excellent level of quality of life. The first two weeks of the recovery may test you both, but after that you will move forward quickly. Any decision on continuing treatments like our chemotherapy is not as clear-cut and the effects are much more complicated. However, the amputation will provide immediate pain relief and allow you to more excellent time together.”

— [cherry](#)



[Sami](#)



[Watch Jerry and Sami Play](#)

Dogs with Pre-Existing Conditions

Sometimes dogs with pre-existing conditions, such as hip dysplasia or previous surgeries, may be disqualified as amputation candidates. Again, we have seen dogs become Tripawds after already having major surgeries, and we've heard of other dogs having major limb surgeries after becoming a Tripawd who recovered nicely.

[Three legged Rottweiler Max](#), for example, underwent a forelimb amputation for bone cancer **after** receiving hip replacements. And [Chuy Maloney](#) had multiple surgeries after becoming a Tripawd.



[See Interview With Three Legged Rottweiler Max](#)

Recommended Reading



[When a Tripawd Needs Another Leg Surgery](#)

[Chuy Proves Three Legged Dogs Can Cope with Leg Surgery](#)

Summary of Thoughts about Contemplating Amputation

Feedback from Tripawd members regarding their decision to amputate. Excerpts from forum posts are followed by links to discussion topics for complete details and additional feedback.

“I don’t regret having Skyler’s leg amputated at all. Although she only survived 3 months, at least we gave her a chance to live a little longer. Her last 3 months gave us the opportunity to spend quality time with her.” — [Golden Girls](#)

 **Join the Discussion:** [Questioning Amputation](#)

“I have absolutely no regrets about amputation. I was afraid the quality of life Tasha would have on three legs and we did question if we were doing the right thing by her. Today Tasha is so full of life, happy and very spoiled. She is a dog just loving life and we are loving life with her.” — [rubyaz](#)

 **Join the Discussion:** [Questioning Amputation](#)

“Yep, he had a good life, and I don’t regret how I did anything, because even after surgery, once he healed, he was enjoying life as usual, and that makes me feel good. To say I’m going to miss this guy is a huge understatement, and just like everyone here when this day comes, my heart is shattered, but I know I did everything I could for him and I wouldn’t have traded him for any other dog.” — [djbockman](#)

 **Join the Discussion:** [Gus earned his wings this evening](#)

“Some of you may remember Radar. Well while grooming him today I realized he had an anniversary coming up. In about 2 weeks he will be celebrating his “2 YEAR” ampuversary. That’s right! 2 years since his cancer diagnosis and front leg amputation. And he is doing utterly amazing – no sign of mets – no sign of slowing down.

What’s his secret? Only he and god knows. Radar and all his two legged friends want to celebrate his ampuversary by passing his hope on to all of you. Cancer is not the end. Amputation is not a storm to be weathered – just a ripple caused by a drop of rain on the ocean of life.

Life can and does go on.” — [borzoid](#)

 **Join the Discussion:** [What a ride, and it’s not over yet](#)

“We had a hard time getting our brains and hearts around the amputation. We didn’t know any tripawds at the time and didn’t find this site until after [Holly](#) came home from her surgery. Our vet told us that dogs aren’t like people – they adapt to life on 3 legs, and other dogs won’t stare at them and think “wow, that dog only has 3 legs.” He was so right. We’ve never looked back at our decision because Holly is so happy.” — [anyemery](#)

 **Join the Discussion:** [I need to decide in a week whether or not to amputate](#)

As soon as they stand up on their own, a front legged Tripawd will instinctively shift the weight of their remaining front limb into the middle of their chest, which is where the nickname “tripod dog” comes from. Front legged Tripawds tend to have a pogo-type hop, because in order to propel themselves forward on one leg while keeping their balance, they need to throw their weight up into the air and land their front leg right in the middle.

For rear leg Tripawds, the challenges they experience can vary among breeds. Tripawds with naturally angulated, low slung rear ends like German Shepherds tend to dip down even lower when walking, and may also take longer to build up strength than other breeds with more table-like body structures.

i Whether your dog is a front or rear leg amputee, [Tripawds will do better when walking at a faster pace](#) than going slow. Tripawd pawrents quickly discover that years of teaching their pups how to heel may quickly get disregarded. Hopping along quickly is usually easier than walking, especially for front leg Tripawds.

All dogs have a different recovery timeline, but generally we’ve seen Tripawds take anywhere from three to six weeks for a healthy recovery. Be patient. My experience was that I did not completely recover overnight. I was slow getting around and it was a couple of months before I really got going again. Even after a year, I was slower and my walks were much shorter, but I was healthy, and that’s all that mattered.

Recommended Reading

 [Denali’s Not Hopping ‘Right’ Yet](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion forum Topic

 [Tripawds Video Interview with CARE, Part 1](#)
Dr. Jessica Waldman Discusses Adjusted Gait and Much More

 [Tripawds – The New Normal](#)
2010 Tripawds Amputation Recovery Survey Results

The Incision

We won’t lie. The surgery site of a canine leg amputation can be a shocking site to see, especially if you’re unprepared. A large area around the incision site will be shaved clean, and the stitches or staples will extend across the entire area where your dog’s leg was. For larger dogs, the surgical site can be 18” inches or longer.



Front Leg Tripawd [Caira Sue](#) and Rear Legger [Codie Rae](#)



[See Wyatt Run](#)



[Watch Cemil Hop](#)

Dr. Waldman Talks About the “Bunny Hop”

[Tripawds Live Ask A Vet Chat Transcript](#)

«Dr.Waldman» So, Denali had a forelimb amputation? Is she “[bunny hopping](#)” at all gaits, slower and faster?

«hstaneK» she has one speed which is for me is a slight jog

«Dr.Waldman» Can you get her to go more slowly to reciprocate forelimb steps? You can often times do this “gait training” through putting poles on the ground as obstacles and having her step slowly over them

«Dr.Waldman» It’s natural for tripawds to use the remaining two front limbs together at a faster gait but usually you can train reciprocal steps at a slower one. Remember when they use two limbs at once they lose extension in forelimbs and hind limbs because of their altered gait so active and passive extension for hips and shoulders is key for long term flexibility

«Dr.Waldman» [Unstable surface work](#) is important for tripawds too, weight shifting, cookie stretches to the shoulder and hips on a couch pillow on the ground daily!

Post-Amputation Fitness Tips

i For more excellent canine exercises, stretching and fitness advice, review our [three-part video interview with Doctors Amy Kramer and Jessica Waldman](#) from California Animal Rehab.

Jerry's Experience

Even before I became a Tripawd, my pawrents thought that letting me play nonstop for hours on end was a good thing. Like many people, they thought that a tired dog is a happy dog, right? Once a week I would go to doggy day care for a few hours and come home tired and exhausted. It was like a big pawty and I was so happy!



Jerry Catches Frisbee
Thrown Low

When I lost my leg, my pawrents assumed it wasn't real good for me to do things like run for miles or jump high to catch a Frisbee, but they still loved seeing me run around and have a blast at the park. They wanted me to do everything I had fun doing, because after all, I wasn't supposed to live that long.

Lucky me though, I beat the odds and lived much longer than anyone thought possible. After my amputation, I played and ran and swam and did everything a dog can have fun doing. But one year after losing my leg, my parents got real scared after one particular play session at the park. I came home and started limping real bad. It looked like I blew my knee out from all that play.

My folks lost a lot of sleep wondering what we would do if I needed a cruciate ligament surgery. I was already beating the cancer odds, so going through another major surgery with a long recovery wasn't something any of us wanted to think about.

But I got lucky, and a [few sessions of acupuncture](#) helped me feel so much better! The [SynFlex liquid glucosamine supplement](#) I got daily also helped me feel better.

Exercise Tips

Gently exercising your dog will keep weight off and prevent destructive behavior. While it's impawtant to apply the concept of regular canine exercise to your Tripawd, remember that even rambunctious three leggers have some special needs that should be heeded.

Playing body awareness games will help improve coordination. Doing simple things like [unstable surface work](#) or just playing with your Tripawd's paws and toes will help:

- Lengthen muscles and stabilize weak areas
- Increase trunk and core strength
- Increase range of motion of joints
- Re-connect leg movements with the brain
- Improve reaction and control of your dog's body
- Improve balance and awareness of the body's position in space



Drs. Kramer and Waldman of [California Animal Rehab](#)

tripawds.com/forums

Join the discussion about canine cancer and amputation for dogs.

tripawds.com/chat

See who's online in the Tripawds Live Chat room.

tripawds.com/videos

Watch inspirational three legged dog movies and informative video interviews.

youtube.com/jerrygdawg

Watch inspirational three legged dog movies and informative video interviews.

gear.tripawds.com

The Best Products for Three Legged Dogs

nutrition.tripawds.com

Healthy Three Legged Dog Diets & Canine Cancer Supplements

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E-Book Reviews, Videos, Podcasts, and Downloadable Resources

Three Legs & a Spare is the first in a series of e-books based on informative content compiled from years of maintaining the Tripawds Blogs community and discussion forums.

It is intended to be an interactive research tool and informative resource for those faced with amputation for their dogs. Written in Jerry's voice, it represents our personal experiences coping with canine cancer, and includes input from many others caring for their own three legged dogs.

This information is not meant to replace any advice from your veterinary medical team.

This book is dedicated to all the amazing Tripawds who show us how to live life to the fullest, despite adversity. We are forever grateful to their pawrents who took the time to share their experiences, which have collectively helped make Tripawds.com the world's best resources for our three legged heroes. Thank you all!

— René Agredano & Jim Nelson

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It's better to hop on three legs than to limp on four.SM

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