

Three Legs & a Spare



A Canine Amputation
Handbook from

tripawds[®]
.com

A dark brown silhouette of a dog, likely a Chihuahua, standing on its hind legs and leaning forward with its front paws raised.

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

Table of Contents

Introduction	4	Chapter 6: Getting Ready for Surgery	35
My Story	4	Tips for Preparing Yourself	35
Building Community and Loving Life on Three Legs	4	What to Expect.....	35
CHAPTER 1: Why Dogs Become Tripawds	6	Tips for Preparing Your Dog	36
Losing a Leg for Reasons Other Than Cancer	6	Is Your Future Tripawd Overweight?	36
What About Prosthetics?	7	Limit Activity Before Surgery	37
Amputation Costs	7	Preparing Your Home	38
CHAPTER 2: The Emotional Impact of Deciding	8	Slip Proof Floors	38
Consider the Facts	9	Recovery Bed	38
Your dog is in serious pain.....	9	Raised Food Bowls.....	38
Your dog doesn't care he has cancer.....	9	Preparing Your Other Dogs	39
Dogs don't look back.....	10	Preparing Human Children	39
Thoughts about Deciding	11	What Will the Neighbors Think?	40
Is Amputation the Right Decision?	12	Pre-Amputation Questions to Ask your Vet	41
Amputation Gets Rid of Pain.....	13	What kind of pain management will you use?.....	41
Is Your Dog a Candidate?	14	Will you leave a scapula or stump? Why or why not?.....	41
What is your dog's overall health?	14	Will you use staples or stitches to close the incision?	42
What is your situation like?	14	What medications / supplements should be stopped before surgery?	43
Overweight Dogs	15	Will the incision be bandaged? If so, do I need to change it?.....	43
Giant Breeds.....	15	How long can I expect the surgery to last?	44
Senior Dogs	15	How long will my dog stay in the hospital?	44
Dogs with Pre-Existing Conditions.....	16	Surgery Day: Relax, Breathe, sleep	45
Summary of Thoughts about Contemplating Amputation	17	Should You Visit?.....	45
CHAPTER 3: Is Your Vet Qualified?	18	Chapter 7: Bringing Home Baby	46
The Medical Team: What to Look for in a Practice	18	Post Amputation Questions to Ask Your Vet	46
Finding a quality vet for surgery.....	19	What should I bring when I pick him up?	47
How often does your vet perform amputations?	19	What should I expect for his breed and size?.....	47
Is your vet willing to refer you to a specialist?.....	19	What were the last medications given and when?	47
Is your vet's practice AAHA-accredited?.....	19	When can I restart supplements?	48
How are patients monitored at night?	19	How soon until our follow up visit?.....	48
Does the practice have modern equipment?.....	20	What should I do in case of an emergency?	48
Are modern anesthesia techniques being used?.....	20	Recovering at Home	48
Are patients monitored during anesthesia?	20	Keeping the Incision Covered.....	49
Does the practice have licensed or experienced veterinary techs?.....	21	Physical Changes to Expect	49
What are your pain management protocols for Amputation surgery?.....	21	Your Dog's New Gait: the Tripawd Hop.....	49
CHAPTER 4: Amputation and Cancer	22	The Incision	50
Dogs Hide Their Pain Really Well	23	Swelling and Inflammation.....	51
My Bone Cancer Story	23	Wound Management.....	52
Bone Tumors	24	Seromas.....	52
Pathological Fractures	25	Bruising.....	53
How do I know it's Bone Cancer?.....	25	Leg Swelling.....	53
What about Bone Biopsies?	26	Going Potty	54
Fine Needle Biopsy.....	26	Using a Homemade Sling	55
Open Incisional Biopsy	26	Coping With Stairs	55
Metastasis	26	Tripawds and Other Dogs	56
When Amputation Isn't an Option for Cancer Treatment	27	Your Dog's Emotions	57
Palliative Care with Drugs.....	27	Walking Your Tripawd	57
Radiation Therapy	28	CHAPTER 8: Pain Management for New Tripawds	58
Limb Sparing.....	28	Tough Love During Recovery	59
Chemotherapy.....	29	Common Pain Medications and Side Effects	59
Holistic Approaches to Cancer Care.....	30	Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)	59
Thoughts About Chemotherapy	31	Amantadine.....	60
Chapter 5: Preparing Yourself	32	Gabapentin	60
Be a Strong Pack Leader	32	Fentanyl	61
Stay Pawstive	33	Tramadol.....	61
Let Go of Guilt, Regret and Shame	33	Butorphanol.....	61
		Buprenorphine	62

Table of Contents

Chapter 9: Recovery	62	Chapter 12: Rehabilitation and Continuing Care	83
Prevent Scratching at the Incision	62	Walking Your Tripawd After Surgery	83
Phantom Limb Pain	63	Weight Management	85
Confinement	64	Healthy Feeding Tips	86
Entertainment Ideas for the Confined Tripawd.....	64	Upgrade Your Dog's Menu	87
Chapter 10: The New Normal	65	Feed Real Foods	88
Who Has it Harder? Front Leggers or Rear Leggers?	66	Talk to Your Vet About Diet.....	88
Chapter 11: Assistive Devices	66	About RAW or "BARF" Diets.....	89
Harnesses	66	Nutritional Alternatives for Cancer Patients	90
The Ruff Wear Webmaster Harness	67	Home Cooking Basics.....	91
The Get-a-Grip Dog Harness.....	69	Post-Amputation Fitness Tips	93
Rear-End Support Harnesses.....	69	Jerry's Experience	93
Dog Boots	70	Exercise Tips	93
PAWz Natural Rubber Dog Booties	70	Don't be a Weekend Warrior.....	97
Ruff Wear Bark'n Boots	71	Conclusion	97
Bella's Pain Relief Pack.....	72	Appendix	98
Life Jackets for Swimming Tripawds.....	73	What is Tripawds?	98
Swimming Tips for Tripawds	73	Tripawds Featured Blogs	99
Dog Leggs Elbow Protectors	75	Tripawds Gear Shop	99
Therapy Beds	75	Tripawds Nutrition	99
The Cool Bed: Restful Sleep for Post-Surgery Tripawds	76	Tripawds Gifts Blog	99
Hot n' Cold ThermoMat.....	76	Tripawds Amazon Selections.....	99
Ruff Wear Flophouse Foam Pad	76	Tripawds Downloads.....	99
Car Ramps	77	Wyatt Ray's Blawg.....	100
Ramp Versus Steps	78	The KillBarney Blog	100
Dog Strollers & Wagons	79	A Few Favorite Tripawds Blogs	100
The Solvit HoundAbout Pet Stroller for Big Dogs	80	Reading List	101
Wagons.....	81	Worksheets	102
Wheelchairs	81	Caregiver Information.....	102
		Daily Regimen	103
		Important Veterinary Questions	104
		Notes.....	107

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.

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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](#))

Introduction

My Story

by Tripawds Founder, Jerry G. Dawg

[Tripawds](#) came into existence because [when I was diagnosed with osteosarcoma](#) in November, 2006, there wasn't much information available to show my pawrents that I could live a good life on three legs. But once Mom and Dad found [Moose, a Tripawd Great Dane](#) who loved digging for gophers, they knew for certain that there is life after amputation.

They gave the OK to doctors to proceed with my amputation, and while they waited for my surgery to be over, as Mom sat there paralyzed with fear, Dad built Tripawds.com, which is now the world's biggest support community for three legged dogs and their pawrents.



Jerry gets discharged from UC Davis Vet Teaching Hospital

Doctors removed my leg, but they didn't take my spirit. From [the day I hopped out of the hospital](#) to go home, my pawrents were stunned at what I could do. Even the most ordinary things I did amazed them, like balancing on three legs while eating dinner, or chasing my favorite red ball around the yard. When I showed them I could swim, I knocked their socks off!

You can see how well I adapted to life on three legs in these early videos of me from shortly after my after surgery:

 [Jerry Does the Rubber Chicken Dance](#)
Happy Jerry plays two months after amputation.

 [Jerry Chases Sticks and Jumps](#)
Jerry runs one month after amputation.



[Moose](#)



[See How Jerry Limped Before his Amputation](#)

Building Community and Loving Life on Three Legs

Suddenly, everything that used to be "routine" was cause for celebration. Finally, they learned that the best way to beat this horrible thing called bone cancer, is to embrace each and every moment as if it were our last. I taught them well.

As this community grew and I beat the osteosarcoma odds, my pawrents and I learned much about canine amputation. Over the course of two years that I was living with cancer, we learned that while most dogs will recuperate from surgery in a matter of weeks, some dogs might not even make it through surgery. We learned that even if a dog is an ideal candidate for amputation, he might experience painful side effects that slow down his healing and keep his pawrents worried. Sadly, we see some dogs earn their wings after just a few weeks of being a Tripawd. And on the occasions when a dog with cancer defies all odds and makes it past the two year mark, we do the hoppy dance and [celebrate with ice cream, like Spirit Cherry](#).

i The Tripawds community is not “pro-amputation.” While we firmly believe that amputation can get rid of the pain and give dogs a great quality of life, amputation is not the answer for every pawdy. We have found that the answer depends on a dog’s pre-existing conditions and overall health at the time. Although we have seen many senior dogs (as old as age 15!) do fine on three legs, others who have battled issues like degenerative arthritis and hip problems may not be suitable candidates. For these dogs, oftentimes dedicated on-going physical therapy can give them enough strength in the affected limb to avoid the surgery altogether.



Colorado Springs Tripawds Gathering
May 15, 2010

Tripawds would never tell anyone they “should” amputate—that’s for you and your vet to decide. But when a pawrent is questioning it, we are here to provide solace to pawrents at their darkest hour, when they wonder what life on three legs is really like.

Amputating a dog’s leg isn’t cruel or selfish; it’s giving our canine heroes the best shot they have at living a hoppy life without the burden of excruciating pain, whether it’s from cancer or an accident.

Amputation isn’t a decision that’s made lightly. It’s a highly personal choice, and many tears are shed over this agonizing call. Our goal with this e-book and [our online support community](#) is to show the potential a canine amputee has, while giving a realistic picture of what to expect.

We hope we have provided this to you, so that you too can make the best decision for you and your best friend, because we believe ... *It’s better to hop on three legs than to limp on four.*SM

Sincerely,



Spirit Jerry G. Dawg
Founder, Tripawds.com

Recommended Reading:

 [Tripawds News Blog: Jerry’s Story](#)
How Tripawds Came to Be



Jerry
October 1998 — October 2008

CHAPTER I: Why Dogs Become Tripawds

Tripawds is a community that nobody wants to join. In our 2010 Tripawds Amputation and Cancer Care Survey, we learned that the most common reasons dogs become amputees are:

- Bone Cancer
- Accidents
- Neglect / Abuse
- Birth Defects

However a dog becomes a Tripawd, you'll see that most people classify them as "handicapped." You'll quickly learn, however, once you meet a three legged dog, that they are anything but disabled!



[Hurricane Rosie](#)



[Wyatt Ray Dawg](#)

Losing a Leg for Reasons Other Than Cancer

Accidents are the second leading cause of membership in the Tripawd club. Tripawd members have lost legs because of mishaps ranging from falling out of a tree, to getting run over by a car. While some dogs will undergo amputation immediately after the accident, more than a handful of others became Tripawds after unsuccessful orthopedic surgeries that tried to save the limb.

Other Tripawds lost their leg because of neglect, like my successor, [Tripawds Spokespup Wyatt Ray](#), who was tied up in a yard as a puppy by his previous human. His tether got wrapped around his leg and cut off circulation before his human both-

ered to do something about it.

Then, there are rescue dogs like [Comet](#), who was born with a birth defect. We've heard about many purebred three legged dogs who weren't considered acceptable for selling, but instead were adopted by caring people who wanted to give a good life to these hard-luck pups.

Dogs who lose a leg but aren't battling bone cancer have a huge advantage. If they are in otherwise good health and not overweight, recovery can be brief. And yes, even senior dogs can bounce back after surgery. While routines may need to be curtailed a bit, for the most part, dogs can thrive and lead quality lives.



Comet

Recommended Reading



[Tripawd Discussion Forums: Brought Back to Life](#)

Inspirational story of Mexican rescue dog saved by amputation

What About Prosthetics?

The funny thing about canine amputees is, humans often have a harder time accepting their condition than the dogs do. When a dog loses a leg, once she recuperates, there's no looking back and no regrets about the missing limb. After a while, we don't even remember when we had that spare leg! But humans tend to feel sorry for us, and wonder if a prosthetic could help us lead "normal" lives. And although there are companies out there who are starting to build expensive custom prosthetics, the jury is still out as to their effectiveness.

Many times we will catch news stories about a three legged dog who is getting a custom prosthetic built just for him. But do we ever hear about how the dog does with it on a long-term basis? We can't recall a single news story about a dog who successfully adapted to one.

Tripawds member [Three Legged Max](#) is actually a prosthetician who designs artificial limbs in real life. In her 10/30/09 Tripawds guest blog post, "[Canine Prosthetics: Pardon My Faux Paw](#)," Max says:

“The majority of dogs who lose a leg have it amputated at the shoulder or hip level. Prosthetically, there isn't much that can be done for them. Besides the fact that it would be very difficult to design a socket that would suspend well on such a short stump (if any stump remains at all), a prosthesis would have to include 2-3 joints — ankle/wrist, knee/elbow, and possible hip/shoulder.

That's a whole heck of a lot of artificial joints and a dog would have a hard time trying to control them. Even for humans using a prosthesis, that's a very difficult level of amputation to fit effectively. For dogs, it's just not practical. In fact, a prosthesis would most likely slow them down and possibly cause injury.

Now, there are some tripawds out there who are only missing a paw. If the dog has his amputation below the "elbow" or "knee", then a prosthesis may be a good idea. Either a plastic or carbon socket would be easily suspended on such a long stump. Also, a prosthesis at this level can be functional and easy to use. From my interactions with these low level amputee dogs who don't have prostheses, I've noticed that they tend to stumble more, not knowing exactly what to do with the short leg.”

Amputation Costs

Amputation costs can vary depending on whether or not a veterinarian or a board certified surgeon does the surgery; where you live; the size of your dog; and how complex the tumor removal is (if applicable). When considering costs, remember; you're not looking for a deal, you're looking for the best care you can afford at a reasonable price.

i Among Tripawds pawrents, since 2008 [the average cost of amputation](#) has been somewhere between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Based on [2010 Tripawds Survey](#) responses, the average cost for amputation surgery was \$2054.



Jerry visits Dr. Mullins at [Veterinary Cancer Care](#) clinic in Santa Fe, NM

<u>Cost</u>	<u>Respondents</u>
\$ 0 - \$1,000	= 22
\$ 1 - \$2,000	= 18
\$ 2 - \$3,000	= 22
\$ 3 - \$4,000	= 8
\$ 4 - \$5,000	= 11
\$ 5,000 +	= 14

This figure is just for amputation, and does not include follow up treatment such as chemotherapy if a dog has bone cancer. Post-surgery complications will obviously increase costs, and rural patients tend to pay less than urban residents.

Recommended Reading



[\\$1,000 vs. \\$2,100 Veterinary Surgery: Which Would You Choose?](#)

PetMD Fully Vetted Blog by Dr. Patty Khuly



[Costs of Amputation and Chemotherapy](#)

Discussion of what members pay for treatment



[Tripawds Discussion Forums: How to pick a doctor for amputation](#)

Tips and advice for selecting a veterinary surgeon or specialist

If You Need Financial Help

In the U.S., less than five percent of pawrents have pet insurance. We all know how devastating unexpected veterinary bills can be on our budgets, and it's a tragedy when humans can't cover the costs of amputation for their beloved dogs. While some are able to get help, others are forced to euthanize their dog because they can't afford surgery.

If you are caught in the heartbreaking situation of not being able to pay for your Tripawd's care, please don't give up. There are organizations who might be able to help.

This [Financial Resources PDF](#) is a list that was compiled by a Tripawds friend, Nicole, Mom to Daggit and Vegas, with the hopes that others may be helped as she was, when she needed it.

CHAPTER 2: The Emotional Impact of Deciding

The information you are reviewing can be overwhelming, and the shock of learning your dog needs a leg removed might send you running to family and friends for comfort. But before you share the news, be prepared for unsupportive feedback from some well meaning but unenlightened humans.



Jerry educates visitors at Lake Itasca State Park, MN

Deciding to amputate isn't easy, mostly because of the emotional pressure a pawrent can feel from friends and family when they disclose that amputation is being presented as an option for treatment. Although Western society has come a long way when it comes to how we treat animals, and most people believe that their dogs are part of the family, when it comes to hard costs, and the image of a "handicapped" dog, these same humans will often surprise us with negative feedback.

Many people will draw the line of how far they will go for a dog, when it comes to amputation and cancer care. They will say things like it's more humane to euthanize a dog than to "put him through that." Others may tell you that you're being selfish for doing it, or that you're crazy to spend so much money

on treatment. They may say your dog is too old, too big, or too incapable of handling amputation. Many of the people in your life that you can generally turn to for advice and help just might surprise you with their reactions.

All we can say is first, you have to forgive them. Then, turn around and ignore them.

Some Tripawd pawrents put it eloquently when they say that money can be replaced, but your dog cannot. No matter what treatment you decide to pursue, always remember; this is a [decision that is between you and your dog](#). Only you know what is best for him and what he is capable of.

Consider the Facts

Unless you have spent time with a Tripawd, it's hard to imagine that a dog can get around successfully on three legs. Here at Tripawds we like to say "Dogs are born with three legs and a spare!" While not having that fourth leg will mean that your dog's endurance for hard play, hiking and running can decrease, by no means does losing a leg make them handicapped. Many dogs have no problem keeping up with the pack, like [Surfer Dawg Rusty](#).



[Watch Rusty Surf!](#)

If you are uncertain about amputation, take a deep breath, and consider these facts:



Jerry on the Day Before
His Amputation

Your dog is in serious pain.

He probably isn't showing it, but if your vet is recommending amputation, the pain is severe enough to recommend removing the leg. And while amputation recovery may appear to be horrendously painful, even in the most challenging recovery cases it's nowhere near as bad as the pain from a fractured leg or slowly exploding bone.

Your dog doesn't care he has cancer.

Your dog won't understand if his leg is broken beyond repair. Heck, he doesn't even know what amputation means. He only knows he's in pain and wants to feel better. He just wishes to be rid of the pain so he can continue loving life, playing and enjoying every minute. When a dog loses a leg, he does not regret. He is not ashamed. And he is not angry that his human allowed it to happen. After the pain meds wear off, after he begins to regain his strength, he moves forward, and never, ever looks back.

It's not an easy road to take, and some people would rather euthanize their dog than find the strength to continue this journey. But most Tripawd pawrents will tell you, the amputation journey is a small price to pay for getting more pain-free, quality living with your dog.

"I can say that my Yoda, who had osteosarcoma, only made it about 4 months after diagnosis and it was still COMPLETELY worth for us. Heck, half that would have been worth it."

— Tripawds Member [yodasmom](#)



Yoda



Peyton

Dogs don't look back.

Witnessing your dog's resiliency, and their extraordinary ability to get on with life while continuing to have fun, is one of the greatest lessons that humans learn after going through amputation with their beloved friend.

Those whose dogs have been through amputation will see that dogs don't carry any burden of guilt, regret or blame that humans do. When a dog loses a leg, the hardest part is getting the human to understand that the typical post-surgery behavior of panting, whining, crying and anti-social behavior is actually just the dog's reaction to heavy duty painkillers like Fentanyl patches and Tramadol.

- i** Most often, side effects or withdrawal from pain medications are the cause of the change in a dog's behavior during recovery. Or, the dog could also be [coping with phantom limb pain](#).

Oftentimes after surgery, pawrents second-guess their decisions when noticing their dog's behavior – which in most cases is just a reaction to pain medications. We think the biggest reason that pawrents think their dogs are depressed is because deep down, they aren't sure about their dogs' ability to cope, and they are projecting those feelings onto their dogs. After all, humans know that they would have a difficult time coping with amputation if they had to go through it.

Dogs are much more resilient than humans. They live in the moment, and have no regrets about losing a leg. Once a dog has recovered, he will go on with life, happy and playful, because that's all that matters.

For some dogs battling cancer, their prognosis may only be a few months after amputation. The most important thing to remember is that it's **quality** of life that matters most, not quantity. If you're going to walk this path together, you need to promise to follow your dog's lead and disregard the concept of "time".

That's because dogs don't frame their lives around these limitations, they just live in the moment, enjoying each day with as much enthusiasm as the last. You've probably never thought about it before, but if you decide to proceed with amputation, you'll truly see the meaning of living in the [here and now](#).



Jerry at Devil's Tower, WY

Recommended Reading



[Pogi is one fast three legged Border Collie!](#)

Inspirational video interview with three-legged border collie Pogi.



[Brandi's story](#)

Discussion about rush decision to amputate for senior dog Brandi.



[Making the tough choice](#)

Discussion about amputation vs. palliative Care



[Watch Jerry Play Frisbee!](#)

Thoughts about Deciding

Tripawds members provide the following input regarding the decision to amputate. Excerpts from forum posts are followed by links to discussion topics for complete details and additional feedback.

“One of the things that really helped me when making decisions for [Maggie](#) was deciding what I would **not** do, things I knew she could not handle because I knew her so well. That is the factor you have to bring into the decision. The specialists are recommending treatments based on protocols and past experience, but they do not know [your dog] very well.

I found when Mag was diagnosed with her second cancer, and I was again discussing options with the oncologist, that knowing what I would not consider made it easier for me to decide on a path forward.” — [krun15](#)

 Join the Discussion: [Questioning Amputation](#)

“When [Fortis](#) was first diagnosed with cancer and the prognosis was given I was not only deeply saddened but confused and lost as well. I had always portrayed myself as the hard type. You know, take the old guy out for one last jaunt in the woods, a swim, a hug, say goodbye and then have our Vet pay our house a visit. No way would I consider amputation, chemo and the such. The judgments of others, self-doubts and guilt all too overwhelming. But a decision needed to be made and fairly quickly. Amputate, euthanize or let Fortis endure pain and wait for the impending fracture seemed to be the only choices.



Fortis

There was no right or wrong choice other than not to let Fortis suffer needlessly.

Fortis' future is a big unknown but I know that when we act out of love for our pups our decisions are always the right ones. I may need reminding of this fact from time to time in the future.” — [Fortis](#)

 Join the Discussion: [Making Tuff Decisions As a Loved One Suffers](#)

“I think the decision to amputate was one of the toughest decisions I have ever had to make. In retrospect, it seems like a no brainer now, but at the time I was so unsure. I think that once you get past that two week post amputation point, you won't need any reassurance or have any doubts about the decision you made though.” — [zoes4life](#)

 Join the Discussion: [Making Tuff Decisions As a Loved One Suffers](#)

“I know how difficult this is for you. It was difficult for my hubby and me to make the choice about amputation... but once we did it, there were no regrets. Our sweet [Jake](#) only lived for another 7.5 weeks afterwards... but they were filled with love and joy and he got to swim and play and cuddle with us... He was taken much too soon!” — [jakesmom](#)

 Join the Discussion: [Making Tuff Decisions As a Loved One Suffers](#)

“I think many of us here are surprised (but happy) we made the decision to amputate. The evening Trouble was diagnosed, I pretty much resigned myself to have her for a couple of months and let her go. My husband was the one who insisted we have a second opinion and 14 months later, I am so glad he did. That second opinion saved her life, not forever of course, but has given us some wonderful months to spend with her we wouldn't have had.” — [hugapitbull](#)

 Join the Discussion: [Making Tuff Decisions As a Loved One Suffers](#)

“Absolutely – pawsitively – 200% sure – NO REGRETS.

I have had over 16 months of wonderful, happy, spiritual, meaningful, deep and memorable moments with my Zeus that I otherwise would not have had. My life is 100% better in more ways than one as a result of this journey I have hopped with Zeus. I would not change a thing.” — [zeus](#)



Zeus

 Join the Discussion: [Making Tuff Decisions As a Loved One Suffers](#)

Recommended Reading

 [Should We Amputate Now or Wait?](#)
Tripawds members discuss reasons to postpone amputation

 [Should we go through with the amputation or use other treatments?](#)
Tripawds members discuss alternative treatment options



[Cemil](#)

Is Amputation the Right Decision?

First of all, you must believe that there is no one “right” decision. Only you know your dog better than anyone else, and it's that knowledge that will help you make the best decision for you both. Ask yourself, “is my dog strong/healthy/spirited enough to endure an operation like this?”

While nobody can guarantee that your dog will have a problem-free recovery and get along well on three legs after surgery, one thing we can say with certainty is *most dogs do just great as Tripawds*. Some factors, such as size, age and overall health will have an effect on how your dog handles it, but for the most part, once the leg is removed and the healing begins, your dog will

almost certainly begin to regain his old personality and start enjoying life again. While every dog's situation is different, we have seen that countless times the vast majority of otherwise healthy dogs adapt well to life on three legs.

Like any major surgery, there is a risk to being on the operating table. If you proceed, you must prepare yourself for the chance that something can go wrong. On rare occasions, this has happened within the Tripawds community. There have been some dogs who, for whatever reason either didn't make it through surgery or [passed away a few days into recovery](#), because of blood clots or reactions that nobody could have predicted. But these dogs are in the minority, and we see far post-amputation more success stories than tragedies in our community.



[Horacia](#)

Recommended Reading

- 
[Boinks Refuses to get up off the floor](#)
Amputation Recovery Difficulties for Saint Bernard Boinks
- 
[Using a Harness or Sling Just After Amputation](#)
Challenges and tips for helping big dogs after amputation

Amputation Gets Rid of Pain

As you struggle with this decision, keep in mind that amputation isn't getting rid of a leg; it's getting rid of the pain! Amputation will immediately alleviate the unbelievably horrible pain a dog is experiencing from bone cancer, or a shattered limb. The resulting recovery is nothing compared to that.

If your dog is fighting cancer, usually amputation will not make it go away. Most bone cancers do metastasize (spread to other parts of the body) eventually. But whether a dog is fighting cancer or undergoing amputation because of an accident, the greatest thing about it is the immediate gift that amputation gives both canines and their humans; it gives them a pain-free life, and more cherished memories.

Whether amputation allows your dog an extra month, year, or longer to lead an extraordinary life, that extra time is all about quality, not quantity. After amputation, every day together is icing on the cake.

While we can't say if your dog is a candidate, what we can tell you is this: we have seen dogs of all ages, breeds and medical conditions adapt to life as a Tripawd. Some need more recovery time than others, and physical therapy might be a good choice for others, but the majority of dogs will do fine after amputation.

 For a glimpse at some of the most common reasons dogs become Tripawds, see:

[Amputation Survey Results: Diagnoses, Breeds and Side Effects](#)

In the Tripawds community, we say that there is no "right" decision about amputation. The only decision that is right is the one that's best for you and your pup. Not every dog is a good candidate for amputation. Deciding to amputate is a gamble, and you must do your research to find out if it's right for your dog.

If you are considering avoiding amputation because your dog is older, has had previous surgeries, or her bone cancer prognosis is poor, remember, statistics are just numbers. All dogs are different and none of them will experience amputation and recovery quite the same way. While your vet can give you benchmarks and averages, your dog is her own dog. A second opinion will go far in helping to ease your mind and confirm you're doing the best things possible for your pup.

We aren't saying the cancer will miraculously disappear after amputation, or your dog will run like a puppy again. And we can't guarantee that your dog will completely recover and get back to her old life. Because like life itself, there are no guarantees. Agreeing to the procedure is taking the leap of faith that everything will go as planned. With luck and a dogged persistence at creating a healthy environment for the both of you, your dog can bounce back successfully and have a chance at beating the odds.

I sure did, and it bought me two extra years with my pawrents.

Is Your Dog a Candidate?

There is a misconception about which dogs are good candidates for amputation. Most people, even some vets, will look at a giant breed dog, such as a Great Dane, and dismiss them as a candidate. Senior dogs, and those who have had previous limb surgeries such as hip replacements might also be considered as bad candidates.

A couple things to consider include:

What is your dog's overall health?

While sometimes age is an issue, most times it isn't. It all depends on what the dog's pre-existing health is like. The healthier the dog the better the outcome. Overweight dogs can make it through surgery and recovery if you faithfully scale back the dog biscuits and help them lose weight right away.

What is your situation like?

Are you able to provide care for a dog after surgery? It will take no less than two weeks of constant monitoring and checking in to make sure everything's OK.

Veterinarians advise clients that it's exactly like bringing a baby home from the hospital. If you're unable to devote so much time to recuperation because of work and family obligations, do you have a support system in place? Are there others who can help?

Most pawrents hesitate to amputate because they believe that living with one less leg is cruel or unnatural. But nearly every dog we've seen at Tripawds has adapted well to life on three legs. It's the humans who have a harder time accepting the dog's condition. And however you both experience it, we can guarantee that your experience will be different from other Tripawds in some ways, and very much alike in others.

Pawrents should be aware that according to the [American College of Veterinary Surgeons](#) ...

“The vast majority of dogs will adapt very well after limb amputation, even if arthritic in other joints, overweight, or a large dog breed. The adaptation period is approximately 4 weeks and is improved if owners have a positive attitude towards their dog and its treatment. . . . there are few medical conditions which would make limb amputation unfeasible.”



[Nova](#)

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](#)

CHAPTER 3: Is Your Vet Qualified?

The Medical Team: What to Look for in a Practice

Once you have considered amputation as a viable option, it's important to ask yourself: What are my vet's qualifications to do the surgery? As much as you might love your family vet, it's important to remember that not all vets can do everything, especially when it comes to performing major surgery.

For many, the decision to amputate is an introduction to the world of vet specialists and high tech medicine. Oftentimes, the learning curve is steep, and stressful, but we hope these tips and suggestions will help.

These suggestions for finding a qualified practice are explained in much more detail in the book *Vet Confidential: An Insider's Guide to Protecting Your Pet's Health*, by Louise Murray, DVM. This educational book should be on every pet pawrents bookshelf.

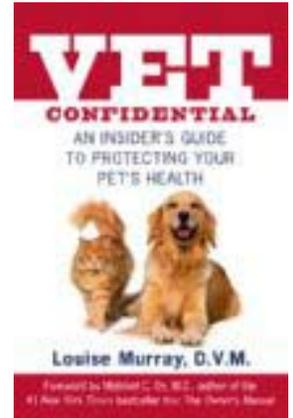
According to Dr. Murray, it's in your dog's best interest to have amputation performed at American Animal Hospital Association accredited facility that provides:

- A system for 24/7 care by licensed providers (if something serious happens, such as a blood clot or severe bleeding, overnight care can be lifesaving)
- Advanced radiology machines (poor quality radiographs are harder to interpret and important information can be missed)
- Modern anesthesia techniques (using the safest gasses, isoflurane and sevoflurane)
- Intravenous catheters and intubation for anesthesia (can quickly deliver lifesaving drugs)
- Methods to monitor oxygen level, heart rhythm and blood pressure during surgery (crucial for preventing anesthetic fatalities by allowing intervention to occur before it is too late)

Sometimes, vets who aren't as familiar with the extraordinary lives of Tripawds may quickly dismiss a dog as a candidate because of his age, or size. If your vet does this, please consider getting a second opinion.

Better yet, [find a specialist](#) or go to [a teaching hospital near you](#). Yes, bone cancers like osteosarcoma can be aggressive, nasty diseases. And if it has already metastasized in the lungs then palliative care may be the right course of treatment, instead of amputation. But if not, you **can** buy precious time with your pup by proceeding with the amputation.

- i** Find a vet who is not only competent but knowledgeable and compassionate enough to understand you and your dog — it's all about **quality** of life, not quantity.



[Tripawds Book Review](#)



[Bisphosphonates](#)
Tripawds video interview with Dr. Jeannette Kelly from [VCC](#) in Santa Fe, NM

Finding a quality vet for surgery

When amputation is recommended by a veterinarian, it's important to feel confident that the vet can handle a major surgery in their clinic. Even if you already have a veterinarian you trust, there are important things to consider prior to surgery that can mean the difference between life and death. We suggest asking your vet a few important questions before assuming she is the best doctor for the job.

How often does your vet perform amputations?

If the vet you are considering for surgery isn't certified by the [American College of Veterinary Surgeons](#), it's important to find out how often the vet performs amputation surgeries. Many Tripawds have had great experiences with family vets performing the surgery, and saved a lot of money as a result. However, a vet who is not a board certified surgeon but performs amputations on a regular basis should have the type of facility that can ensure all risk is kept to a minimum.

Is your vet willing to refer you to a specialist?

For dogs with an undiagnosed condition that may require amputation, your vet should be willing to refer you to a specialist for additional diagnostics and testing. Even if you return to your vet for the amputation and subsequent treatments needed, your vet should be willing to consult with specialists for advanced care required by your dog's condition. And we strongly suggest getting referrals to patients who are willing to share their experiences.

Is your vet's practice AAHA-accredited?

A practice accredited by the [American Animal Hospital Association](#) (AAHA) has to meet stringent standards of care, utilize modern equipment and trained staff. AAHA accreditation is reassurance that your vet's practice voluntarily meets the highest standards.

How are patients monitored at night?

Did you know that not all vets provide overnight care? When dogs need overnight hospitalization, having trained staff at night can mean the difference between a smooth recovery and serious complications that go undetected for hours. Many Tripawd pawrents have called the vet's office the morning after a successful surgery, only to find out that their beloved dog died sometime during the night.

Large vet practices usually have certified medical staff that check on patients at night, but smaller ones usually don't. High quality, small practices will have arrangements with larger facilities that either have a certified veterinary technician stop by periodically throughout the night to check on patients, or they have an arrangement that allows patients to be transferred to a 24-hour care provider at night, and returned in the morning. However, many times, pawrents must act as the ambulance. If this is your vet's arrangement, ask yourself; would you want to move your critically sick animal back and forth?

-  Avoid any facility that does not have after-hours monitoring. There have been some Tripawds who we suspect could have been saved if someone had been there at night to monitor them closely.

Does the practice have modern equipment?

In *Vet Confidential*, Dr. Murray recommends choosing a practice that has all of these pieces of equipment:

- **Blood Pressure Equipment:** Has your vet ever checked your dog's blood pressure? It's surprising to find out that many vet practices don't check blood pressure on patients. However just like it is with people, it's important to know that an animal's blood pressure rate is too low or too high for example, when he is under anesthesia.
- **PCV Centrifuge:** A PCV centrifuge measures red blood cell levels. This machine can save your dog's life if he loses blood during surgery and your vet suspects he may need a transfusion. The PCV centrifuge will measure the patient's red blood cell levels immediately, instead of losing precious time waiting for lab results to come back to the office.
- **Pulse Oximeter:** A pulse oximeter monitors an animal's oxygen levels. Anyone under anesthesia must have their oxygen level monitored.
- **Modern Radiology Equipment:** Most vets have an x-ray machine but not all are modern enough to produce high quality images. Ask your vet how his x-rays are developed: do they get developed by hand? By an automatic processor? Or are they digital? [Digital radiography](#) is the current standard. Poor quality x-rays developed by hand are hard to interpret and miss important information. This is a huge reason why so many Tripawds' bone cancers (like mine), went undetected for months and caused precious treatment time to be lost.



[Procedural Monitoring](#)
Tripawds video interview
with Kelly Cronin, Head
Technician from [VCC](#)



Digital X-Rays Provide Greater Resolution

Are modern anesthesia techniques being used?

Dr. Murray says it's critical to find out what type of anesthesia the practice uses. The most modern standard of gas anesthesia are isoflurane and sevoflurane. Halothane, an older gas anesthesia, is not as safe. Dr. Murray also says that any animal under anesthesia should have an IV catheter in place. A catheter can quickly deliver potentially lifesaving drugs during surgery. Finally, Dr. Murray says that all patients should be intubated while under anesthesia. An intubation tube in the windpipe will prevent saliva, blood or vomit from entering the trachea and lungs, and deliver lifesaving oxygen and/or assist with breathing during surgery.

Are patients monitored during anesthesia?

A practice should be monitoring the oxygen level, heart rhythm and blood pressure throughout surgery. This is critical for preventing anesthetic fatalities, and can warn the doctor that the patient's oxygen level or heart rate is falling. Dr. Murray says that at a minimum, the pet's oxygen level and pulse rate should be monitored during the procedure by a pulse oximeter (see above). She also says it's safest if a surgeon has a technician to monitor anesthesia during surgery; it's very difficult to do both monitoring and the surgery itself at the same time.

Does the practice have licensed or experienced veterinary techs?

A veterinary technician plays a lifesaving roll in the medical procedure, similar to a nurse for humans. Licensed technicians understand how to perform things like measuring and administering drugs, placing catheters and monitoring animals under anesthesia.

However, not all states require licensing. But even if they don't some practices will require their techs to be licensed. And the more licensed technicians, the better off your pet will be. To see if your state requires licensing, check the [American Association of Veterinary State Boards](#) directory. Then, ask your veterinarian:

- Do you use licensed technicians?
- What kind of training do your technicians have?



Jerry gets blood drawn by [VCC](#) technicians

What are your pain management protocols for Amputation surgery?

Tripawds' resident vet, Dr. Pam Wiltzius of Puyallup, Washington, recommends asking about pain control.

“It used to be that pain was dealt with post-op, but a lot of pain can be prevented now by administering the drug Gabapentin pre-op, using an MLK (morphine) drip during and after surgery, and performing nerve blocks intra-op.” — [tazziedog](#)

She adds that some dogs only get Rimadyl when they go home after surgery, which is not the current standard. There is a huge difference in pain protocols among vets. Some still don't adhere to modern protocols, which can delay recuperation. Be sure you know where your vet stands on pain management.

“I would always use what is called a CRI (continuous rate infusion) of morphine, lidocaine, and ketamine (MLK) during the amputation. These drugs help prevent a lot of the pain felt after an amputation and allow you to use less gas anesthesia during the procedure. The drip is continued post op until the dog is comfortable.”

Tazzie's surgery lasted 3 hours and she needed the drip for 12 hours post op until she was comfy. I have to admit that I slept on the kennel floor with her all night long just to make sure she was OK.

I started her on three drugs the day before surgery. One is a Fentanyl patch applied to one of her back legs. This is a narcotic that lasts 3-5 days. The other drugs are Gabapentin and Amantadine. These are drugs used in human medicine and both are inexpensive and very safe (main side effect is sleepiness from Gabapentin).

Gabapentin is used to prevent nerve root pain and theoretically can help with “phantom pain.”

Dr. Wiltzius' documented her firsthand experience with canine amputation, when her English Mastiff Tazzie, underwent the procedure in 2008. Dr. Wiltzius shared her protocols in the Tripawds Discussion Forums:



[Tazzie coming home: One Vet's Amputation Surgery & Recovery Tips](#)

We can't ask our dogs about that, but I think that it does exist! Gabapentin is continued for 2-4 weeks after surgery depending on the dog.

Amantadine helps prevent what is called pain "wind up." Once the pain receptors are annoyed it takes more pain meds to calm them down. This drug blocks that response and can be used for 1-2 weeks post op. Lots of dogs with chronic arthritis also take this drug for flare-ups when the Rimadyl or other NSAIDs they are taking stop working."



[Tripawds Video Interview
Dr. Wittzius and Tazzie](#)

Recommended Reading



[Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine](#)

Your Pet is Going to be Anesthetized



[How to Choose a Veterinarian for Amputation Surgery](#)

Tripawds video interview with Veterinary Technician Kelly Cronin, Head Technician



[Digital Radiography: MRIs and CT Scans Demystified](#)

Tripawds video interview with Dr. Laura Hady



[Protect Your Tripawd's Health with Vet Confidential](#)

An Indispensable Guide for Understanding Your Pet's Veterinary Care



[Tazzie Coming Home](#)

One Vet's Amputation Surgery & Recovery Tips

CHAPTER 4: Amputation and Cancer

According to the [2010 Tripawds Amputation and Cancer Care Survey](#), more than 90 out of 123 dogs became Tripawds because of some form of bone cancer, which is one of the most common ways a dog loses his leg.

When a dog is diagnosed with bone cancer, vets typically give pawrents the option to:

- amputate only
- amputate and follow up with chemotherapy
- or, provide pain relief through pharmaceutical drugs until quality of life diminishes.

The prognosis for many bone cancers is poor, with few dogs living more than a year after diagnosis, even when treated with amputation and chemotherapy. Oftentimes when pawrents are given these grim statistics, they wonder if putting a dog through amputation recovery is a worthwhile endeavor. Some pawrents believe that the recovery is too much for their dog to tolerate, especially if they are older or affected by other ailments.



Even if your dog has been given a poor prognosis, did you know that nine out of ten statistics are wrong?

Statistics are just that. They only speak of averages, not about what is going on with your dog himself. They are an educated guess, and many dogs go way past their prognosis. Doctors said I had four months at most, but I lived two years past my amputation!

Also, keep in mind that your dog doesn't care if he is given a week or a month or a year for a prognosis. Dogs can't count, they don't mark days off calendars, and even if they could, a year to a dog is an incredibly long time. All he wants is to be out of pain, and enjoy every day with you.

If you're still uncertain if amputation is a good decision and you're leaning toward palliative care with only painkillers, consider what four to six months on painkillers feels like. For most people and animals, painkillers put them in a doopey haze, cause constipation and nervous behavior. To many pawrents, pain management through drugs sounds like a more acceptable solution. But, if you don't amputate, do you really want your dog's last months on earth to be spent in a fog?



German Shepherd Tripawd [Bandit](#)



[Xander](#) Before Amputation

Dogs Hide Their Pain Really Well

When a dog has an injury, he will do his best to hide the pain. Our instinct is to act normal for as long as pawsible. In the wild, if we showed our pain, we would be eaten. A weak dog means a weak pack, and in order to ensure the pack's survival, the sick dog must be eliminated.

Unfortunately, the pain of bone cancer usually doesn't exhibit visible signs right away, and most of us have vets who spend months trying to figure out what's going on. Typically, most tumors won't show through the skin for a long time. While it grows, we will limp off and on but the doctor will usually diagnose it as arthritis or a sprain. Our affected limb may lose muscle tone because we aren't using that leg.

Oftentimes the disease goes untreated for many months as our pawrents give us one new arthritis drug after another to see which one makes us feel best. When the pain begins to be unbearable, it will usually come on suddenly and seemingly from out of nowhere.

My Bone Cancer Story

My osteosarcoma presented itself in the typical way that it does for most dogs my age. I had started slowing down during walks, months before I was ever diagnosed. Because I was a whopping eight years old at the time and had already been diagnosed with mild hip dysplasia, my vet just said I was getting old. He gave me one non-steroidal after another to treat what he insisted was arthritis. I'd go on a new drug for several weeks and feel better, but as soon as my Mom cut back on the dose, the pain and my limp returned. I would stall on walks and refuse to go more than a block.

One night when my limping got really bad, Dad was lightly pressing all of my legs and flexing my feet, trying to find out where I was hurting. When he pressed a spot on my shoulder, it hurt so bad I let out a loud yelp. That's when he and Mom knew something more sinister than arthritis was happening, and they vowed to find out what.



[Video of Jerry Limping Before Surgery](#)

Some dogs aren't so lucky. Many never find out they have bone cancer until their leg breaks. When a dog starts limping, crying out in pain, becoming grouchy or snippy for seemingly no reason, or refuses to play her favorite games and activities, something is definitely wrong. That's when it's time to see a vet.

Recommended Reading

-  [American College of Veterinary Surgeons](#)
Bone Tumors in Cats and Dogs
-  [Veterinary Practice News](#)
A Guide to Managing Osteosarcoma Patients
-  [OncoLink Veterinary Oncology](#)
Bone Tumors in Dogs
-  [Mar Vista Vet](#)
Answering Your Questions About Canine Osteosarcoma
-  [Land of Pure Gold Foundation](#)
Canine Cancer Surgery Options and Limb Sparing

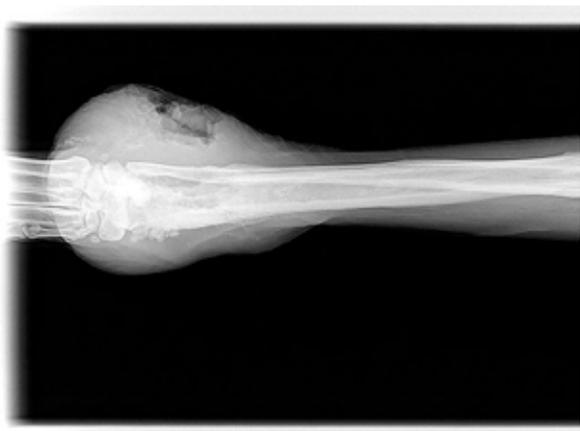
Bone Tumors

Usually, a vet will first take an x-ray of the suspected painful area. But many vet offices don't have sophisticated x-ray machines that can pick up the faintest spots where tumors are growing. Lesions less than 3 mm large will not show up on x-rays. If the tumor has grown larger than that, bone cancers can be quickly diagnosed. But if the tumor is smaller, doctors can spend a lot of time trying to diagnose the condition without the help of a CAT scan or MRI machine.

My own family vet had no idea what was wrong when I started limping and my pawrents took me in to see him. Multiple X-rays and hundreds of dollars later, nothing showed up on the films. When my vet's assistant quietly suggested that we visit another local clinic with better x-ray equipment, we did. And when that clinic still couldn't see what was going on with their sophisticated machine, my pawrents took me to the University of California at Davis, a six hour drive from our house but one of the best vet hospitals on earth with the most modern machinery available (teaching hospitals tend to be more technologically advanced than private practice clinics).



Jerry Holding His Paw Up Before Surgery



Advanced Osteosarcoma Tumor in a Dog's Limb

Just one MRI later, [everyone knew why I felt bad](#) — there was a huge cancerous tumor growing inward on my shoulder blade.

Believe it or not, this is one of the best case scenarios that can happen if a dog has bone cancer. Because if a tumor isn't caught in time, a pathological fracture can suddenly occur at the invasion site, causing the most horrible pain on earth, and the worst crying sounds that a pawrent can ever hear.

Pathological Fractures

Bone cancer tumors will weaken bones. If a dog has bone cancer, there is always the possibility that even the most minor injury will cause the bone to shatter on impact. This is known as a “pathological fracture.” These breaks will not heal or stabilize.

We have seen scenarios where a dog who isn’t showing signs of bone cancer will suddenly break his leg while running or playing hard. This is a horrifying scenario for both dog and human, which is why it’s so important to watch your dog carefully so you can avoid the drastic, dramatic situation of a [pathological fracture](#). Oftentimes, this won’t happen [until many weeks have passed](#) between the first outward signs of bone cancer (i.e., limping) and the sudden break.



[Daisy](#) With Osteosarcoma Tumor in Limb Before Surgery

How do I know it’s Bone Cancer?

To reach a definitive diagnosis, your vet will conduct a full exam of your dog. According to the [American College of Veterinary Surgeons](#), it should proceed something like this:

“Physical and orthopedic examination, blood tests (complete blood count and serum biochemistry), radiographs of the affected bone, chest radiographs or computed tomography (CT) scans, and bone scan are recommended for dogs with a suspected primary bone tumor. Physical examination is necessary to assess general health status and identify any other concomitant problems. Orthopedic examination is important to identify the affected bone, rule-out other causes of lameness (particularly cranial cruciate ligament rupture, hip dysplasia, and neurologic disease), and evaluate the potential for adapting to life on three legs if limb amputation is being considered. Blood tests are recommended to assess general health status as many cats and dogs with primary bone tumors are older and may have other problems which need to be considered when developing a treatment plan. Also, one of the enzymes assessed in the serum biochemistry screen (alkaline phosphatase) can provide information on postoperative prognosis.”



[Dr. Hady Demystifies MRIs and CT Scans](#)

Recommended Reading



[Digital Radiography: MRIs and CT Scans Demystified](#)

Tripawds video interview with Dr. Laura Hady

What about Bone Biopsies?

Usually an x-ray will be enough [to diagnose bone cancer](#), but when it cannot, there are two kinds of bone biopsies that can help draw a conclusion.

Fine Needle Biopsy

The preferred biopsy method for diagnosing appendicular tumors is called a “[fine \(closed\) needle aspirate](#)” biopsy. This is what I had, because my tumor was growing in such a weird place (my scapula). A fine needle aspirate biopsy is a quick, in-office procedure that can detect up to 94 pawcent of bone cancers. There is little risk of a pathological fracture happening, and little pain involved.

Open Incisional Biopsy

The more invasive bone biopsy, known as an “open incisional biopsy” is a general anesthesia procedure that takes several large bone samples from the affected area. It is a highly painful procedure, which most experts feel is unnecessary and less advantageous than a fine needle aspirate biopsy. It’s success rate at diagnosing the cancer is actually less than a closed needle biopsy, and it can cause complications such as hematoma, infection, dehiscence, tumor seeding, and pathologic fracture.

While bone biopsies will help determine what kind of cancer your dog has, and what kind of treatment is best if you are considering chemotherapy, bone biopsies are not necessary if you know you will not pursue chemo. Also, conducting a bone biopsy isn’t necessary before amputation surgery, if you are certain you will amputate.

If you are considering amputation but want a definite diagnosis, spare your dog the agony of this extra procedure – and your wallet: bone biopsies are typically in the \$300 range. Ask your vet to conduct the bone biopsy after the leg is removed.

Metastasis

Dogs who have been diagnosed with bone cancer in the leg will immediately be checked for lung metastasis before amputation surgery. Metastasis is when the cancer cells have spread from the bony area with cancer, to another area, typically the lungs. However, we have also seen “mets” also appear in the spine.

According to the [American College of Veterinary Surgeons](#):

“Appendicular osteosarcoma is a highly malignant and metastatic disease in dogs. The lungs and other bone are the two most common metastatic sites, occurring in approximately 10% of dogs at the time of diagnosis (but up to 90% of dogs at the time of death). Chest radiographs or CT scans are necessary for the evaluation of metastasis to the lungs. The incidence of bone metastasis, which often does not cause clinical signs, is approximately the same as lung metastasis but

One of our favorite dog vets, Dr. Demian Dressler, says in his [Dog Cancer Survival Guide](#) e-book, has this to say about bone biopsies and staging cancers:

“One of the tricky things about staging is that there can be cancer spread that is actually not picked up by any of these tests. There is a phenomenon called micro metastasis, which is the spread of cancerous cells through the circulation into other body areas. These cells have not yet multiplied enough to make large tumors that can be detected by tests.

Since cells are so tiny, these cancerous cells are often totally invisible to our medical instruments. Micro metastasis can make cancer treatment much more difficult, because when things are undetectable we can’t deal with them.”



has a much greater impact on management options as there is a high risk of fracture through the metastatic lesion as a result of increased weight bearing after limb amputation.

A whole-body bone scan is the most effective technique to evaluate for the presence of metastatic disease in another bone, although nuclear medicine facilities are not be widely available. Whole-body radiographs are an alternative to bone scan but are more time consuming and costly, and metastases may be missed with radiographic evaluation because they may not be as sensitive for picking up bone changes as a bone scan.”

Recommended Reading



[Canine Bone Appendicular Tumors](#)

Veterinary Society of Surgical Oncology



[Bone Biopsy for Bone Cancer](#)

Bone Cancer Dogs



[Pez' Story: Sudden Pathological Fracture After Diagnosis](#)

Pez was diagnosed 01/10. Her fracture story begins on this page, dated 6/17/10

When Amputation Isn't an Option for Cancer Treatment

Bone cancers like osteosarcoma can be an aggressive, nasty disease. Younger dogs less than five years old tend to have a poorer prognosis than older dogs. If there is a tumor in the lymph nodes where the leg is being amputated, survival times are usually poor. And if the cancer has already shown signs of metastasizing in the lungs, then palliative care may be the right course of treatment, instead of amputation.

In future editions of Tripawds eBooks we will address cancer therapies in more detail. Until then, we strongly recommend you download [Dr. Demian Dressler's Dog Cancer Survival Guide](#) for the most up-to-date information covering conventional and holistic cancer therapies.

In addition to amputation, current bone cancer treatment options include:

Palliative Care with Drugs

Some pawrents choose to forgo amputation and will attempt to manage the bone cancer tumor pain with drugs and radiation therapy.

Drug therapies include giving the dog a combination of Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs), [Bisphosphonates](#), narcotic pain relievers such as a Fentanyl patch, and supplemental pain relievers such as Tramadol.

While some dogs can go many months without vocally expressing any symptoms of pain, the experts at [Mar Vista Vet](#) note:

“No single medication, however, is a match for the pain involved in what amounts to a slowly exploding bone. A combination of medications is needed to be reasonably palliative and should be considered only as a last resort if amputation or radiation therapy will not be pursued.”

Radiation Therapy

According to the [Colorado State University Animal Cancer Center](#) ...

“Radiation therapy and surgery are the only modalities that can locally control solid tumors such as carcinomas and sarcomas. Radiation therapy can also be used to provide relief of pain, or improve function in patients suffering from advanced cancers.”

The goal of radiation therapy is to manage pain in the dog's affected area. For most bone cancers, it will not cure the cancer, but simply make the pain more tolerable. According to [Dr. Dressler](#), radiation therapy will alleviate symptoms in about 83 percent of dogs. Most treatment plans consist of four sessions, and a single session can provide pain relief for about 50 days. The downside to this therapy is that it tends to only be available in larger cities and at university teaching hospitals.

According to the [Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences](#), Western College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan ...

“The median time to improvement in limb function after radiation treatment has been reported at 11 to 15 days. The median duration of partial or complete pain relief ranges from 1.8 to 4.3 months, and the median survival in dogs with osteosarcoma after palliative radiation therapy ranges from 4.1 to 10.4 months.”

Recommended Reading



[A Look at Colorado State University's Animal Cancer Center](#)

Advances in Radiation Therapy at CSU



[Tripawds Downloads Blog: Bisphosphonates Brochure](#)

Veterinary Cancer Care Clinic Bisphosphonates Information



[Bisphosphonates: When Amputation isn't an Option](#)

Dr. Jeannette Kelly Discusses Zoledronate Clinical Trial Results



[Stereotactic Radiosurgery](#)

Tripawds members discuss SRS treatment option for canine cancers



[Making the Tough Choice](#)

Tripawds members discuss amputation vs. palliative care



[Palliative Radiation Therapy for Canine Osteosarcoma](#)

Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences, Western College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Saskatchewan

Limb Sparing

[Limb sparing](#) (also known as limb salvage) is a surgical procedure that provides an alternative to amputation in selected dogs being treated for bone tumors. It is often considered for dogs with concurrent orthopedic problems, such as severe arthritis, that might not do as well on three legs. The goal is to remove the diseased bone and surrounding tissues while still preserving the function of the remaining limb. Limb sparing is performed in conjunction with chemotherapy (and in some instances, radiation therapy as well).

While not every dog is a candidate for limb sparing, at Colorado State University's [James L. Voss Veterinary Teaching Hospital](#), out of 300 surgeries, about 85% of patients have experienced good to excellent function. According to the canine bone cancer support group [Bone Cancer Dogs](#) ...

“...the average survival after limb sparing and chemotherapy is 50% or better at 1 year, which is equal to the survival of dogs receiving amputation and chemotherapy.”

However, according to [Dr. Demian Dressler](#), in up to 28 percent of cases, tumors will regrow in the remaining bone. Tumors may also recur in other areas of the body.

Recommended Reading



[Limb Sparing in Dogs](#)

Oncolink Veterinary Oncology Service



[Happy Ampuversary Lily. Two Years Later, Still Going Strong](#)

Tripawds video interview with multi-surgery canine cancer survivor

Chemotherapy

For most of us, the thought of putting our dog through cancer therapy is a scary proposition. If we don't have previous experience with human or animal oncology, words like “radiation” and “chemotherapy” might conjure up images of day-glow dogs and traumatic day-long visits to the vet's office.

In November 2006, [when I was first diagnosed](#) and the surgeon mentioned chemotherapy, this is exactly what we pictured. Later, we were reassured to learn that dogs usually suffer fewer side effects than humans and quickly bounce back.

Prior to being treated, your dog will be carefully screened to make sure she can withstand chemotherapy. Dogs with pre-existing kidney issues will be given extra consideration when it comes to the type of treatment being used. The type of chemotherapy agent your veterinary oncologist recommends will depend on the type of bone cancer your dog has been diagnosed with. For bone cancers, carboplatin, cisplatin and doxorubicin are the most commonly used chemotherapy agents.



In subsequent editions of Tripawds e-Books we will discuss canine cancer care in much more detail, but for now, here are some links with helpful information.

Recommended Reading



[Canine Bone Cancer Treatment News](#)

Tripawds video Interview with Dr. Mona Rosenberg



[Confused About Chemotherapy](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Regrets about Chemotherapy](#)

Tripawds members discuss feelings about chemotherapy for their dogs



[Should You Seek an Oncologist or Stick with Your Family Vet?](#)

Tripawds members discuss selecting a veterinary specialist for consultation and treatment



[Chemotherapy Questions and Answers](#)

Colorado State University Animal Cancer Center Educational Resources



[Treatment Options for Bone Cancer Dogs](#)

Treatment information from the Bone Cancer Dogs support group



[Chemotherapy for Daisee](#)
Tripawds Video Interview



[Atomic Jerry](#)
Just for fun – Jerry visits the Trinity Test Site

Holistic Approaches to Cancer Care

Cancer therapy is a multi-billion dollar industry beckoning with promising treatments as well as snake oil “miracle cures.” Please use discretion when pursuing any alternative treatments. Dr. Demian Dressler, author of the *Dog Cancer Survival Guide*, takes what we think is a wise approach toward care:

“When I make a cancer diagnosis in my own practice, I describe a treatment strategy by creating what I call a Full Spectrum Cancer Care Plan. Because each dog and each cancer is different, most plans are different.

A Full Spectrum Cancer Care Plan can feature everything from chemotherapy drugs to medication to nutritional supplements. In a Full Spectrum Cancer Care Plan, we focus on strategies and techniques that have:

- *scientific studies supporting their effectiveness;*
- *a very strong theoretical background for effectiveness;*
- *a very strong historical, common use that supports effectiveness;*
- *minimal side effects or ones that are tolerable.”*

When seeking a doctor to treat your dog’s cancer, we urge you to talk to both practitioners of Western and alternative medicines before solely deciding on one approach. Don’t rely solely on the Internet for your choice of therapies. Find the right **licensed** practitioner that suits your philosophies toward care and always discuss any treatments you wish to pursue with that individual.

Various alternative canine cancer supplements and pain management solutions can be found on the [Tripawds Nutrition](#) blog [Supplements](#) page.



[Acupuncture Session for Jerry](#)

Recommended Reading

-  [Homeopathic Canine Cancer Treatment Articles](#)
Tripawds Nutrition Blog Posts Tagged: Homeopathy
-  [How Chiropractic Care Can Help Your Tripawd](#)
Learn About the Benefits of Alternative Medicine
-  [Dr. Charles Loops, DVM](#)
Meet the Popular Holistic Dog Cancer Vet
-  [Jerry’s Canine Cancer Diet and Supplements](#)
Example of Healthy Osteosarcoma Treatment Plan
-  [Tazzie’s Canine Cancer Treatment Plan](#)
A Veterinarian Shares Cancer Diet and Supplements for Her Dog
-  [How K9 Immunity Works](#)
Natural Immune System Supplement for Cancer Dogs
-  [Canine Acupuncture and Massage](#)
Tripawds Video Interview Featuring Jerry’s Acupuncturist
-  [Comprehensive Dog Cancer Survival Guide](#)
Dr. Demian Dressler’s Full Spectrum Cancer Care eBook



Jerry Gets Acupuncture Treatment

Thoughts About Chemotherapy

Comments from Tripawds members who opted to proceed with chemotherapy for their dogs:

“Absolutely no regrets for us! For us there never really was any decision on the course of our treatment after discovering the Osteosarcoma. Only the amputation followed by a very aggressive chemotherapy treatment protocol would give us the chance to return [Cherry](#) to the quality of life that had defined her eleven years before the cancer...”



Cherry

I also realize that chemotherapy is a little more difficult decision and depends on the type of cancer, the spread, the availability, and any complications. Cherry really did not suffer any nausea, vomiting or drop in blood cell counts that can accompany chemotherapy.” — [cherry](#)

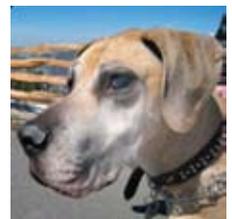
“[Emily](#) only made it 5 1/2 months after amputation and that was with chemo. I can't say I regret the chemo because I feel like we gave her every chance at life and with the exception of low white blood cell counts Emily didn't have any other problems.”
— [emilysmom](#)



Emily

“I do not regret chemotherapy one bit. But it's hard to say that if [Nova](#) died during or immediately after chemo, I am not sure that I wouldn't have had regrets.

Nova has survived 14 months (and counting)... she and Trouble were diagnosed within days of each other. 4 rounds of carboplatin with no side effects whatsoever. I was offered adriamycin too (one of the protocols was to rotate adriamycin and carboplatin), which was presented to me as a “more affordable” option. But after reading so much about the horrible heart-related side effects of adriamycin, I decided against that.



Nova

I was not taking that risk, just to save a few bucks, even though I had always been told that Nova (Great Dane) had a very strong heart.” — [Dane Mom](#)

 **Join the Discussion: [Do You Have Regrets About Chemotherapy?](#)**

Chapter 5: Preparing Yourself

Amputation is harder on humans than it is on the dog. If you decide to amputate, managing your own mental state of health will likely be more difficult than getting your dog, your house, or your kids ready for the change.

i Your own fear is a bigger obstacle than the surgery itself.

Be a Strong Pack Leader

Emotions are the universal language of dogs. Before, during and after surgery, you must be a strong pack leader and put aside any feelings of sadness or pity towards your dog.

Your dog picks up on every emotion you have, so being positive will help him make the transition faster. While it's difficult to watch your dog's first steps on three legs, remember that soon he will re-learn how to run, go to the bathroom, and play on three legs.



Tri-Pug Maggie

Keep in mind that dogs don't feel sorry for themselves when they lose a leg, they're just glad to be out of pain and want to get on with the business of playing. This is how they live in the moment, so be sure to follow their lead!

We've all heard the analogy that dogs can sense fear on people, right? According to [Dr. Demian Dressler](#), dogs can actually smell fear. And, he says, your dog is probably more upset by your fears than his own aches and pains.

Every Tripawd pawrent feels overwhelmed, angry and scared at this time. And we know it's hard to think optimistically when it's clear that your dog's way of life will be altered forever, and you are faced with so much uncertainty.

But you must remember; **you can't control the future, only how you react to the situation.**

😊 "The only way to get through crap and not smell it is to look past it." — Dave Ramsey

"Life is 10% what happens to you, and 90% how you respond to it." — Lou Holtz

So, how will you spend these moments with your best friend? Calmly loving your dog and reassuring her that everything will be OK? Or crying out in fear while your dog hides under the bed?

If you have to go outside for a good cry, do it, as long as you return with a smile on your face. Projecting confidence will make all the difference in the emotions your dog picks up on you.



Jerry makes Mackenzie smile.

"I, not events have the power to make me happy or unhappy today. I can choose which is shall be.

Yesterday is dead, tomorrow hasn't arrived yet.

I have just one day, today, and I'm going to be happy in it."

— Groucho Marx

[More Inspawrational Quotes](#)

Stay Pawsitive

There are many things you can do to strengthen your outlook while drawing you closer to your dog. Dr. Dressler recommends numerous exercises that can help you take the focus off of your grief and anger. His recommendations include:

- Vent productively. To get the anger out of your system, try hard exercise or scream into a pillow, where your dog can't hear you. Vent until you're exhausted, and run out of steam.
- Learn gentle [dog massage techniques](#).
- Have a heart-to-heart with your dog, giving thanks for all she's brought into your life. Thank her for all the things that went right with her life and your time together, instead of focusing on what went wrong.
- Treat your dog's spirit as well as her mind; enhance your dog's quality of life, by creating gentle change through things like varying your walking route, going on short trips to new places, or adding a special "cheat treat" (Spirit Cherry recommends [ICE CREAM!](#))
- Keep a journal or start a Tripawds Dog Blog. It will allow you to review days and compare how your dog does from surgery day until the day she swims (or hikes or runs) again. A journal will help you make honest assessments of your Tripawd's progress during the ups and downs of recovery.



[Be Pawsitive
Tripawds Apparel](#)

Let Go of Guilt, Regret and Shame

You're probably feeling guilty over making such a major decision for your dog, who doesn't understand what's about to happen (or why it did). But before you let the guilt take over, remember: dogs aren't burdened with those silly human emotions of guilt, shame or regret. Those feelings are strictly a human thing. He's not wondering why his leg is gone; he's loving the fact that he's out of pain.

When you introduce a Tripawd into a pack of other dogs, nobody says "hey dude, what happened to your leg?" They just get on with the business of playing.

After a dog loses a leg, all he wants is to recuperate so he can go play again. Dogs do not mourn the past, or feel ashamed for being different. Your dog will not hate you, or be angry. When you pick him up from the hospital, he might appear confused, or fearful, and this will tear your heart out.

But remember, any look of confusion or fear doesn't run too deep for dogs. Your dog may appear to look that way only because he was so surprised he stayed overnight at the vet's, and those pain meds running through his system are making him see pink elephants!

- i** We'll talk about pain meds later, but for now, you should know that pain meds **will** cause odd behavior in just about every dog, which humans often mistakenly interpret as depression.

But it's usually not depression. Your dog just had a major surgery. He learned to walk (or hop) in a matter of minutes. He may be exhausted, and a little confused, but he's very happy to go home and rest. Your job will be to carry on, and begin living again, pain-free and without worry, regret or fear. The sooner you can normalize your life together, the faster your dog will heal.



[New Tripawd Jerry
Plays with Santo](#)



[New Tripawd Jerry
Plays with Zeus](#)

Recommended Reading



[Tripawds Video Interview: Canine Amputation Rehabilitation](#)

Amputation Recovery Advice from Doctors at California Animal Rehab



[CARE Doctors Discuss Amputation Recovery](#)

Tripawds Three-part Interview with Doctors from California Animal Rehab



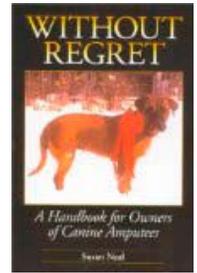
[What Have I Done?](#)

Tripawds Members Discuss Regrets About Amputation



[Never Regret Your Decision to Amputate](#)

Tripawds Book Review: Without Regret — A Handbook for Owners of Canine Amputees



[Without Regret
Tripawds Book Review](#)



Tips for Pawrents to Cope with Recovery

Be strong. Your dog needs you to be a strong, balanced pack leader.

Be more dog. Think like a dog, and live in the now.

Always remember, dogs don't know shame, regret or anger; your dog will not hate you.

Don't overwhelm yourself with too much information or too many changes at once.

All dogs are different, what works for one may not work for another.

The first two weeks after surgery are the hardest; arrange to be with your Tripawd for the first few days after surgery; take time off if you are able.

Normalize life as soon as she comes home from the hospital; no babying, no carrying, no sleeping on the floor. If you want life to be "normal" again, act as though it **is** normal.

Accept the Inevitable and celebrate each day you have together. Every minute, every adventure whether around the house or down the road, is a blessing.

Chapter 6: Getting Ready for Surgery

Tips for Preparing Yourself

Ask any Tripawd pawrent and they'll tell you: the first two weeks of recovery are hell.

One doctor we interviewed, [Dr. Christine Hady](#) of the Veterinary Emergency and Specialty Centers of New Mexico (VESC), advises clients that post-amputation surgery recovery is akin to bringing home a baby from the hospital.

What to Expect

- Bodily functions will need monitoring, such as urination, defecating, breathing and appetite
- Sleep will be a luxury; pain meds can make dogs pant, whine and pace
- Pain meds usually cause a decreased appetite and constipation
- Most dogs will walk within 12 hours of surgery, but you may need to assist her in going potty at home the first couple of times (see our "Preparing your home" tips).
- Some dogs will get a "seroma" or a fluid buildup at the surgery site. This is normal and usually isn't a problem.
- While infections are rare, they do happen. You'll be monitoring the surgery site to check for signs of infection and irritation.
- Every hint of unusual behavior will make you nervous, and every step he takes may cause worry.

While these aren't the only situations Tripawds encounter after amputation surgery, they're the most common. If you are ever worried about your dog's post-surgery behavior, call your vet. Remember, that's why you pay them.

All Dogs are Different

While all dogs are different in how they recuperate, the amputation surgery recovery generally lasts anywhere from two to four weeks, and sometimes longer depending on the dog. Recovery time can also depend on any pre-existing health conditions too. Yes, many dogs are moving around pretty normally within a week or two, but some dogs take longer. A few months may pass before your Tripawd can build up more endurance.

Accept that there will likely be challenges over the next few days that may make you sad, or even regret that you went through with the surgery.

That's normal. Don't beat yourself up, you're doing what you think is best for your dog. Remember to be strong, and know that the recovery time is just temporary. Don't get discouraged if you think progress is slow, and don't compare your dog's recovery with others you read about on [Tripawds](#).



[Daisy Rae](#) recovers from Amputation Surgery

- i** If your family and friends are not supportive about your decision, it's probably best to avoid them during these two weeks if you can.

And finally, remember to embrace the little steps along the way. Because the greatest lesson you will learn from your dog during this experience is ...

- i** Enjoy the moment at hand, our time together today is really all we have.

Recommended Reading



[Amputation Rehabilitation Advice](#)

Three-Part Video Interview with Doctors from California Animal Rehab



[Dog Leg Amputation Seromas: What You Need to Know](#)

Photos and Information About Post-Amputation Swelling and Bruising



[Regrets About Amputation](#)

Treatment and Recovery Advice from Tripawds Members



[Tomorrow Is the Big Day](#)

Tripawds Presentation and Diagnosis Discussion Forum Topic



[Never Regret Your Decision to Amputate](#)

Tripawds Book Review: Without Regret — A Handbook for Owners of Canine Amputees

Tips for Preparing Your Dog

Pre-Surgery To Do List:

- Lose weight
- Limit his activity
- Study new diets but don't make changes all at once
- Get him used to confinement
- Trim the fur between paw pads (to improve traction)

Is Your Future Tripawd Overweight?

Nobody is ever prepared for their dog to lose a leg, so if your dog is overweight when you receive the news, you'll have an extra challenge ahead of you. But don't let that rule out amputation as an option. Weight can always come off, and oftentimes it will, before amputation. Dogs lose weight a lot faster than humans do.

Tripawds' resident vet, Dr. Pam Wiltzius, says "Most overweight dogs do fine as tripawds as long as their other joints are relatively stable."

- i** If your dog is overweight, please review the [Weight Management](#) section for tips about helping your dog reach an ideal weight for life on three legs.



Trouble manages weight with her [canine reducing diet](#).

For many of us, spoiling our dogs means feeding them tempting treats as rewards for being cute, or leaving food in their bowls so they can eat whenever they want. All of this “love” they get is reflected in the scary statistics about the numbers of obese pets in developed countries.

 Up to 40 pawcent of our canine friends are overweight.

Most people don't know that their dogs are overweight. So, how can you tell? According to the [Purina Body Condition System](#) ...

- You should be able to feel and see your dog's ribs.
- He should have an hourglass figure; can you see his waist when standing above him?
- Finally, his stomach should be tucked up when viewed from the side.

Recommended Reading



[Need Advice About Amputation for Overweight Dog](#)

Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic



[Canine Reducing Diet](#)

Tripawds Eating Healthy Discussion Forum Topic



[Trouble is the Biggest Winner](#)

Pitbull Pawrent Shares Her Canine Reducing Diet for Trouble



[Association for pet Obesity Prevention](#)

Download Information on Safe Weight Loss, Calculating Calories, etc.

Limit Activity Before Surgery

Consider yourself very lucky if you have time to prepare for amputation surgery. Many pawrents don't have more than a day or two before the big event. If you have the luxury of time, keep in mind that the best time to get your dog ready for recovery, is before the amputation surgery.

Please, take a very conservative approach toward pre-op activity and care.

- It may be tempting to go out for one last four legged hike, but our advice is; take it easy. Most dogs, even with a bum leg, will keep playing to the point of exhaustion, and it's up to you to make sure that she doesn't injure herself even more. Your dog should have as much energy and strength as possible before going into the surgery ward.
- If your dog has bone cancer, heavy activity increases the risk of pathological fracture. Use care to avoid this horrible emergency.
- Assist your Tripawd when getting up or down off the bed or couch. This may take some dedicated re-training, but it's important. After surgery, your Tripawd will forget that they are adapting to a new body, and can hurt themselves if they attempt these acrobatics alone.
- Purchase a [Ruff Wear harness](#) to help your dog get in and out of vehicles or offer assistance on stairs, etc. Introducing this before surgery will make it easier for your Tripawd to adapt to the harness and your assistance once she is healed.

Preparing Your Home

Slip Proof Floors

Confinement is key to safe recovery, and one of the best ways to ensure plenty of rest after surgery. Purchase an [adjustable pet gate](#) to block off stairs and slippery areas of your house. Practice keeping your Tripawd confined to a small area in your home for a few minutes at a time.



[PAWz Dog Boots Review](#)

Put down runners and rugs on all bare, slippery surfaces in your house. [Slip proof every area](#) where your dog regularly hangs out. A spill right after surgery can be a real confidence killer to a new Tripawd. However, once your dog learns how to adapt, any minor stumbles or spills while playing won't be such a big deal to him (you, however, will need to stay calm).

Other ideas for reducing the hazards of slippery floors include using a product called "[Show Foot](#)" anti-slip spray, or Musher's Secret, a paw wax used on sled dogs to provide traction. To prepare for vet visits or other outings where you may encounter slippery floors with your Tripawd, consider getting some [PAWz rubber dog booties](#) to improve traction. More [no-slip floor ideas](#) can be found in the Tripawds News blog.



Lalla Rests Comfortable on Baby Crib Mattress

Recovery Bed

Lots of fluffy pillows in her sleeping area may sound great, but make sure she has a [firm and supportive mattress](#) so getting up and turning around won't be difficult. For maximum comfort, consider a [thermoregulating dog bed](#) — dogs will often seek a cool spot to ease their pain, and these orthopedic beds can maintain therapeutic temperatures.

Raised Food Bowls

Consider raising her food and water bowls. You can try cutting a hole in the bottom of an inverted bucket for dishes, or just put them on a box to see how your dog reacts.

Elevated bowls help to maintain proper posture, which is especially important for larger dogs. New canine amputees regaining their balance benefit greatly from an easier stance when eating and drinking from an elevated feeding station.

The Tripawds Gear blog recommends [many styles of raised feeding bowls](#). Various others are available online or can be found at your local pet supply stores too.



Jake's Elevated Feeding Station



Spright, Wyatt and Calpurnia at Tripawds Party

Preparing Your Other Dogs

If you have other dogs, introduce them to your new Tripawd slowly. Try creating a safe space for your recovering pup to ensure safety. [Use a pet gate](#) to block off a separate recovery room, or put a [portable exercise pen](#) somewhere where the pack interacts.

Typically, the worst things other dogs in the pack might do is sniff your pup, but only because he smells like the vet's office and surgery medication. Strange dogs may act differently, some may sense weakness and attempt to take advantage.

While we don't know of any siblings in a pack who have attempted to hurt a new Tripawd in the family, it's best to play it safe at first, and let your patient know that she has a safe spot to hide in when things get rowdy. You know your dogs best. Supervise your recovering dog until you know it's safe to leave them alone.

Preparing Human Children

Kids tend to react to Tripawds in one of two ways, which generally reflect the way adults around them do. They will either be fascinated and in awe of their amazing capability, or slightly scared and hesitant to approach.

Here are some tips for preparing your children before surgery:

Start by showing them [videos of Tripawds swimming](#), running and enjoying life. They might not even notice these dogs are missing a leg at first!



Jerry makes kids smile.

Next, remind them that like these dogs, your dog will still have one more leg than they do! By creating a sense of normalcy around amputation, your kids will be less afraid.



Horacia

Consider putting an old t-shirt on your recovering pup to hide the healing surgery incision from unsuspecting eyes.

Finally, take a walk together with the family and your pup if you can. Breathe. Relax. Take pictures. Celebrate life. Enjoy the time you have now, and remember that the next phase of your journey isn't the end to your favorite things to do together, but rather the beginning of a courageous new adventure that will make both of you stronger, and wiser than ever.

Recommended Reading

- 
[Non-slip Indoor Boot for a Big Tripawd?](#)
 Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic
- 
[Tomorrow is the Big Day](#)
 Tripawds Presentation and Diagnosis Discussion Forum Topic
- 
[Recovery with Small Children Advice?](#)
 Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic
- 
[Tripawd Siblings Feeling Left Out](#)
 Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic
- 
[Confinement is Key to Safe Recovery](#)
 Tripawds Gear Blog: Best Crates, Gates and Portable Pens
- 
[Help Tripawds Gain Traction on Slippery Floors](#)
 Tripawds Gear Blog: Boots Reviews
- 
[Teaching Kids About Tripawds](#)
 Tripawds Reviews Children's Books About Three Legged Dogs



[Three Legged Dog Children's Books](#)

What Will the Neighbors Think?

Some pawrents have reported that adult friends and relatives have reacted extremely unpleasantly when seeing the Tripawd for the first time, and many want to hide the incision site until it heals. To anyone who becomes upset by it, we suggest asking them...

“Would you rather see her limping around in pain?”

We agree that the surgery incision is not pretty, and may be downright scary for small kids. Check out our canine amputation [post-surgery photo gallery](#) to prepare yourself. If you have small children and wish to spare them the sight for a few days until they're comfortable with their new three-legged sibling, it's fine to ask your vet for a bandage, or use a [Tripawds t-shirt](#) to cover it up. Boxer shorts can be used for rear leg amputees.



Timber Recovering From Her Amputation

Recommended Reading

- 
[Tips on Covering up Incision area](#)
 Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic

Pre-Amputation Questions to Ask your Vet

Getting answers to the following questions will help you prepare for your dog's amputation and recovery.

What kind of pain management will you use?

As Dr. Wiltzius previously mentioned, the current gold standard in pain management is to prevent pain *before* it occurs. She says many vets are administering the drug Gabapentin before surgery, then using an MLK (morphine) drip during and after surgery. Nerve block drugs are also used during surgery.

- i** The most common post-amputation pain relievers that dogs receive are a combination of:
- [Fentanyl](#) – a transdermal skin patch that delivers timed narcotics (similar to morphine) that lasts for about three days per patch
 - [Tramadol](#) – a daily pain reliever with similar effects to narcotics but not as strong.
 - [Gabapentin](#) – an anti-seizure drug that blocks pain and is often used to control phantom limb pain

Less common medications include [butorphanol](#), which can alleviate pain but only provides relief for up to an hour, and [buprenorphine](#), an injectable drug that lasts slightly longer than butorphanol.

A Non-steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug, or [NSAID, such as Metacam or Deramaxx](#) is also often prescribed. When used in combination with any of the above drugs, NSAIDs provide long term effective pain relief after surgery.

- i** Please jump to [Chapter 8](#) for a discussion about side effects of pain management medications.

Recommended Reading



[Canine Rehabilitation: Pain Meds and Supplement Tips](#)

Tripawds Video Interview with Doctors from California Animal Rehab



[Pain and Pain Control in Dogs](#)

Informative article from vetinfo.com



[Advice to Dog Owners Whose Pets Take NSAIDs](#)

Informative article from veterinarypartner.com



[Be Aware of Canine Drug Dangers](#)

Information from Yahoo Group: Dog Health 2



[Tripawds Video Interview: Pain Medication](#)

Will you leave a scapula or stump, or remove the entire area? Why or why not?

The decision to leave any part of the limb depends on if the dog has bone cancer and where it is located, as well as the preference of the surgeon. Dr. Michael Lucroy, an oncologist from Indiana, told us in our [November 2009 Live Ask A Vet Chat...](#)

“In our practice, our surgeons always do what is known as a forequarter amputation – that is they take everything from the scapula on down. This is my preference because it is faster for the surgeons, so less anesthesia time for my patients. For our surgeons, a forequarter amputation usually takes about 75-85 minutes – longer for very large size dogs or those that are obese.”

— [Dr. Michael Lucroy](#), Veterinary Information Network Consultant

He added that removing the entire limb “leaves a much nicer appearance, especially in short haired dogs. It is also more comfortable for them – the muscle surrounding the nub will atrophy and the underlying bone loses its cushion.”

Dr. Lucroy says “If the tumor is in the femur, the entire leg always comes off. If it is in the tibia, then I defer to the surgeons and they do a high mid-shaft amputation. There is a ton of muscle over the bone so usually they do OK.”

Will you use staples or stitches to close the incision?

We’ve often wondered why some dogs get stitches, and others get staples. In our [2010 Tripawds Amputation and Cancer Care Survey](#), 36 out of 99 respondents said their dogs had staples, and 58 out of 99 said their dogs had stitches. This could simply be because stapling is a more modern technique, and not all vets have invested in stapling equipment.

“I think that sutures are definitely more comfortable for the dog, and may be more cosmetic. Staples are much easier to remove than sutures, and don’t cause a skin reaction like some suture material can.” — Dr. Pam Wiltzius



Xander's Stitches

Dr. Wiltzius explained that staples are usually selected because they are faster, which means your dog won’t be anesthetized for as long a period of time. One advantage of staples is, if a seroma develops, a few staples in the affected area can be removed so the fluid can drain on its own.

A 2000 study by the [University of Illinois’ College of Veterinary Medicine](#) stated that during intestinal surgeries, the end results of both techniques are similar...

“Approximating end-to-end intestinal anastomosis with a skin stapler is equivalent in bursting strength, lumen diameter, lumen circumference, and healing characteristics to the traditional hand-sewn technique, but it can be performed in significantly less time. CLINICAL RELEVANCE: Skin stapling devices can be used to create technically simple, rapid, and safe end-to-end anastomoses in canine jejunum.”



Titan's Staples



Mate Got Stitches And Staples

While some people will say that the decision of staples versus stitches rests with the surgeon, ultimately it is your choice since you're paying their bill. If you have a preference for one over the other, be sure to state it before surgery.

Recommended Reading



[Live Chat with Vet Oncologist Dr. Michael Lucroy, November 2009](#)

Questions, Answers and Transcript Highlights



[Stitches versus Staples](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Incisions and Healing](#)

Surgery Recovery Article from PetEducation.com



[Comparison of skin staples with sutures for anastomosis of the small intestine in dogs.](#)

Department of Veterinary Clinical Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Illinois

What medications / supplements should be stopped before surgery?

Provide your vet with a list of all supplements and medications your dog is taking. Many supplements will thin the blood, and should not be taken prior to surgery. These include but may not be limited to:

- Alfalfa
- Chondroitin (glucosamine is OK)
- Omega-3 supplements (salmon and fish oil)
- Garlic
- MSM
- Probiotics
- Reishi mushroom
- Turmeric/curcumin
- Vitamin E
- Vitamin C

Recommended Reading:



[When Herbs and Supplements Don't Mix](#)

Veterinary Practice News Complementary Medicine Article

Will the incision be bandaged? If so, do I need to change it?

In the [2010 Tripawds Amputation and Cancer Care Survey](#), 60 out of 99 respondents said their dog's incision area was not bandaged after surgery.

When my surgery site was left unbandaged, my pawrents were shocked, but the vet reassured them that air drying would help the site heal faster (as long as I kept it clean). Some dogs leave the hospital with compression bandages, but oftentimes the bandages either come undone, bunch up, or hide what's going on underneath, like swelling. We think that bandages are applied more for the pawrent's sake than for healing purposes.



Jerry came home with no bandage.



Cemil wears T-shirt over his bandage.

Be sure to let your vet know what your preference is. We haven't really noticed a difference in how well dogs heal with bandages versus without. We did, however, hear about one case where complications arose due to the use of a compression bandage that was too tight. Be sure to ask your vet about any specific concerns.

Recommended Reading



[Saw the vet today – new bandaging yet again](#)

Raven's Mom Discusses Post-op Bandaging

How long can I expect the surgery to last?

Depending on the size of your dog and whether or not a tumor is being removed (and where), amputation can take anywhere from 45 minutes to three hours. Be sure to ask your vet where your dog falls in this range, and when you can expect an update. If you don't hear from them within that time frame, be sure to call. Remember, you're not bugging them — you won't interrupt the surgery by calling the front desk, and after all, you're paying their salary!

How long will my dog stay in the hospital?

Pawrents are always shocked to learn that dogs usually stay just one night in the hospital after amputation surgery. Most dogs are standing within 12 hours, and ready to go home within 24. Not too many humans can beat that!

Your vet won't release your dog until all vital signs are stable and he can stand up and eliminate on his own, as well as show some kind of interest in food. Since you will be tending to your dog constantly after surgery, if you have obligations that won't allow you to give your undivided attention, or won't be able to lift your dog to get into the car upon discharge, ask your vet to allow your dog to stay an extra night or two (they almost always happily oblige). This has worked well for pawrents who need more time to prepare their home, family members and schedules.



Denali

Surgery Day: Relax, Breathe, sleep

On surgery day, you'll be nervous, emotional and scared. That's OK, it's human. But for your dog's sake, you'll need to hold the tears back until you are alone.

The best thing you can do for your dog is project strong, positive energy. Dogs are pack animals, and they will follow the direction of their leader.

- Your emotions will set the tone for the day, so do your best to stay calm and optimistic from the time you wake up until you know your pup is feeling good again.
- You can help yourself stay calm by having some of your favorite comfort foods and beverages around. Books, movies and aromatherapy will also help.
- Get enough sleep, because your dog will probably keep you awake for a few nights.
- Try to make arrangements to take time out, have others watch the kids or remove yourself from obligations that will take you away from your patient.



Wyatt gets a checkup at [Colorado State University](#)

We're not advocating for doting all over your dog when she comes home, but being mentally available and calm will go a long way toward a fast, smooth recovery.

Should You Visit?

Most vets will tell you that they don't want you to visit your new Tripawd at the hospital. That's not to spare you the shock of seeing your dog as a Tripawd, but to prevent your dog from getting overly excited at seeing you there. Most dogs become very anxious if they see their pawrents, only to be left behind when they leave.

Don't insist on a visit; let your dog rest and sleep off the surgery anesthesia as long as possible. You'll have plenty of intense time to spend bonding together in the next couple of weeks.

Recommended Reading



[Surgery Day](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Tomorrow is the big day](#)

Tripawds Presentation and Diagnosis Discussion Forum Topic



[Woooo The Nerves!](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic

Chapter 7: Bringing Home Baby

Immediately after the surgery, the horrible pain your dog was in will be gone. Any post-surgery pain will pale in comparison to that of bone cancer. But, there will be post-surgery challenges. Remember, amputation is a major surgery, and as easy as dogs can sometimes make it look, the road to recovery can be long and challenging.

The most beneficial thing you can do is get yourself mentally prepared, and be a strong pack leader. Accept that there will likely be challenges over the next few days that may make you sad, or even regret that you went through with the surgery. That's normal. Don't beat yourself up, remember to be strong, and know that the recovery time is just temporary.

The recovery experience is both similar and different for all dogs. Dogs are a lot like people when it comes to amputation recovery...

- Some [dogs won't let you do anything for them](#) because they can do it all themselves.
- Other dogs are drama queens, looking for sympathy from everyone around them, whining and crying at every chance they get.
- Most dogs will look to you, their pack leader, for guidance.

After surgery, you'll notice that your dog's walk has changed. This may make you sad. It can be bittersweet to see him hopping toward you. Suddenly you'll be hit by the reality that your life together will be very different. But please put those feelings aside, and try to rejoice in the fact that your dog is out of pain, incredibly resilient, and coping with amputation far better than any human ever will.



[Watch Xander Walk After Surgery](#)

During the first few weeks, do your best not to get discouraged if you think progress is slow, and don't compare your dog's recovery with others. Remember that recovery times are all different for each dog, and progress is gradual, anywhere from a couple of weeks to a couple of months. Always remember to embrace the little steps along the way.

Even if you have been through some kind of post-surgery rehabilitation yourself, keep in mind that your dog will heal at a different pace, on her own time. [Don't force her to do anything she doesn't want to do](#), for example, by making her go on increasingly longer walks too soon after surgery.

You'll need to hop the line between making sure she is comfortable, supported and protected, while giving her enough confidence to get back up on her own three feet to take on the world. Usually dogs will do this on their own, but there are many dogs who will feed off their parent's fears, and as a result, take longer than they should to fully recuperate.

Post Amputation Questions to Ask Your Vet

Once your vet calls to say that your Tripawd has made it through surgery, there are few more questions you should ask before picking him up.

What should I bring when I pick him up?

Will you need someone to go with you to help? Larger dogs may need some help getting into the car, especially if you have a high-clearance vehicle. Since we don't recommend using a [Ruff Wear harness](#) until the incision site has healed, you should be prepared to help your dog in other ways, if she needs the support. To help hoist your dog into the car, use a soft towel slung under the belly. A reusable canvas shopping bag slit down the sides also makes a handy temporary sling.

i **How to Make a Homemade Sling:** Making a helpful sling to help support your new Tripawd is easy! Cut a canvas grocery bag down the sides and use the handles as a belly support device when needed.

Chances are, your dog will be so doped up he'll let you lift him without a problem. But if he is heavy, he may be so out of it he'll go limp when you pick him up, so you may need another person to help him into the car.



Taking Jerry home after Surgery

What should I expect for his breed and size?

Again, this is one of those "it depends" areas, but what we've seen is that most dogs, large or small, will be strong enough to walk to the car without assistance. Your dog may need a little help with trickier areas, such as eating and elimination.

Giant breed dogs may take longer to get around easily. Our general experience has been that for some reason, [Saint Bernards](#) have demonstrated the hardest time getting around after surgery. We can't say all of them will, but that's just what we've seen in the [Tripawds Discussion Forums](#).

However, even a small Chihuahua can have mobility issues. How quickly your dog will recuperate and regain strength really depends on pre-existing conditions and any compensatory issues.

Be sure to have a full workup and physical analysis of your dog's health and mobility prior to surgery to know what you might be able to expect.

What were the last medications given and when?

Find what pain meds your dog is on and when you should give him his next dose. Manage your dog's pain by knowing exactly when his last round of pain medication was given. Stick to the schedule your vet recommends to keep pain from spiraling out of control. Ask your vet about [Amantadine](#) to prevent this common scenario.

We recommend keeping a journal with your dog's medications, quantities and times given, or you can use [a spreadsheet like the one Tripawd Genie's Mom created](#).



[Tripawd Power
Blank Care Journal](#)

When can I restart supplements?

Find out when the supplements your dog was taking can be given again safely, without interfering with healing. And if your dog will be undergoing chemotherapy, Tripawds member Trouble's mom recommends not adding any new dietary items until all treatments are done...

“Our vet was very specific about not wanting me to change diets until after the chemo was complete. He did not want to have the possibility of the diet causing symptoms thrown into the mix and then try to decide if complications arose whether it was caused by the chemo or the diet.”

— [hugapitbull](#)

How soon until our follow up visit?

Most dogs will have their sutures removed within 10 to 12 days. Generally, that's when the worst of the recovery period is over. But again, if your dog experiences any reactions that concern you, don't hesitate to call your vet before your next visit. A phone call can go a long way toward putting your mind at ease. And we'll say it one more time...

 Don't feel bad about calling the clinic! After all, you're paying their salary!

What should I do in case of an emergency?

It's always better to be safe than sorry. So be sure to ask your vet: What if I think something is wrong? Who can I call after hours? Where is the closest 24-hour facility and who should I ask for?

If you have any concerns about your dog's behavior once he's released, always call your vet first. But before calling, write down the symptoms, when they started and how frequently they occur.

Recovering at Home

When your dog returns home, always focus on her beautiful face, not her surgery site. Present strong, paw-sitive energy and we guarantee she will be empowered by it. Your dog should be alert enough to stand and hop on her own. She may look tired and a bit confused, but please don't mistake that for depression or anger towards you.

Most times, [what humans think is depression](#) in their dog is just the dog's reaction to pain medication. Heavy duty painkillers like Fentanyl patches and Tramadol can induce whining, crying and anti-social behavior. Remember, your dog isn't used to these drugs, and they're probably making her see pink elephants. Most often, withdrawal from pain meds is the cause of the change in behavior. Or, they could be coping with a condition called [Phantom Leg Pain](#), which is when a dog's brain hasn't realized that the affected leg is actually gone. This painful condition is also common with human amputees.

We think the biggest reason that pawrents think their dogs are depressed is because deep down, they aren't sure about their dogs' ability to cope, and they are projecting those feelings onto their dogs. After all, humans know that they would have a difficult time coping with amputation if they had to go through it. Please keep in mind that dogs are SO much smarter and resilient than humans! Dogs live in the moment, and they have no regrets about losing a leg. When your dog is done healing, he will go on with life, happy and playful, because that's all that matters.

Keeping the Incision Covered

To avoid infection and other complications, it is imperative to keep your dog's incision clean and dry. It is also important to protect the site from your dog's licking or scratching. Despite these precautions, you can expect some leakage from the area to occur.

To address these concerns, use an old t-shirt to keep the healing wound covered. For front leg amputees, one arm of a t-shirt can be cut off and sewn closed. Dog sweaters, like [Fido Fleece coats](#) with Velcro closures, can also help cover the incision while keeping your shaved dog comfortably warm.

For rear leg amputees you may have more of a challenge, but boxer shorts worn with the tail through the flap may help. Review this discussion forum topic for additional suggestions: [New Rear Leg Amputees Keeping Incision Covered](#)

- i Cover your car seats with blankets and towels for the ride home from the vet's office. Gross and messy post-surgery events, like nausea and incision leakage, can discolor your upholstery.



Jerry recovering in his [Fido Fleece Dog Coat](#)

Recommended Reading:

🗨️ [Depression - day 8](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic

🗨️ [Depression](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic

Physical Changes to Expect

Your Dog's New Gait: the Tripawd Hop

When you first see your Tripawd come toward you, you'll notice that her gait has changed. Please don't feel sorry for her or think of her as "disabled" when you see her new walk. Remember, your dog is out of pain, feeling good and happy to be alive! She's running toward you because she's happy!

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!

We strongly suggest reviewing some of the [Tripawds treatment and recovery photos](#) for examples of what to expect.

The surgery site will have internal as well as external stitches. Some vets will take care to create a clean incision, while others may be a little sloppy. (I was left with a funny nipple at one end of my incision. Perhaps the students at [U.C. Davis Vet School](#) where I had my surgery were a little new at stitching!)

The site may be nasty looking, but remember; [fur will grow back](#), eventually. The scary incision area will heal. The shock will wear off. When you see the site, please, don't cry. Just look your dog in the eye, and focus on her pretty face. Tell her she is beautiful, and you're glad to see her. Then, smile, and remember that the horrible pain she was in is gone, and she's now on the road to recovery.

Recommended Reading



[How long did your fur take to grow back after surgery?](#)

Tripawds News Blog Readers Comment on Fur Regrowth



[Are You Furry Again?](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



Maddie



[Nikki the Rott](#)

Swelling and Inflammation

According to Dr. Jessica Waldman of [California Animal Rehabilitation Center](#), most dogs who are in pain will prefer ice over heat. Your dog may be different, so we suggest following the advice of physiologists who practice sports medicine:

- If there is swelling and pain use ice.
- If there is no swelling, but stiffness is present use heat.
- If this is an acute injury (within first 6 weeks) use ice.
- When in doubt, use ice or moist heat.

We recommend using [Bella's Pain Relief Pack](#), a hot / cold ice pack designed specifically for dogs. It comes in a fabric pouch that you can Velcro around the affected area of your dog's body. It is a safe solution for either heat or ice therapy that will stay put on your dog.

Tripawd pawrent Chris says:

“One of my smartest purchases for Bonnie's post-surgery care was a [hot/cold pack-age from Bella's Pain Relief](#) that is mentioned on this site. It is a thin gel pack, that does not stay cold for hours, so you have to put it back in the freezer. But the best thing about it is that it comes in a cover/envelope that has two Velcro straps attached. It straps in place and stays put even when the dog moves. Bonnie loved it and I did too. It protected her stitches somewhat and I did not have to worry about her getting to her wound when I had it in place. The cover is washable and it really helps.”



[Bella's Pain Relief Pack Video Review](#)

Recommended Reading



[Titus' Day 1 post-op](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Bella's Hot/Cold Pain Relief Pack](#)

Tripawds Product Review, Demo Video and Coupon Code



[Dog Leg Amputation Seromas: What You Need to Know](#)

Tripawds news Blog Readers Comment on Surgical Site Seromas



Breeze

Wound Management

Keeping the surgery site clean is vital. Although your vet will give you an anti-biotic to ward off any infections, do not let your dog outside off-leash for anything except potty breaks, for at least the next week. You need to give the site time to heal without risking bacteria and dirt getting inside the area.

Whether your dog has a bandage or is wearing a t-shirt, always check to ensure that the bandage or t-shirt doesn't cut off circulation, whether your dog is standing or laying down. A compression bandage should be snug but you should be able to get two fingers under it. Because compression wraps support muscles and swollen tissue, there should be less fluid production. Two of the most common issues that affect post-surgery Tripawds are seromas and bruising.

Seromas

Seromas are an accumulation of fluid and blood at the surgery site. Think of it like this; all bodies are filled with fluids that move around inside. When a leg is removed, those bodily fluids have nowhere to go. Usually the fluids will get re-absorbed into the body, but oftentimes they will puddle up at the area of least resistance; the surgical site. The seroma may or may not leak. Sometimes veterinarians will attempt to avoid this altogether, by [placing a drain in the area](#) while closing off the incision.

According to [Michigan Veterinary Specialists...](#)

“Seromas may occur at the surgical site. A seroma is an accumulation of fluid in the tissues. The body will usually absorb the fluid, but the fluid is sometimes drained if needed.”

Northern California's [Veterinary Surgical Associates](#) say:

“If the region around the incision becomes progressively more swollen, your pet may have a seroma, which is an accumulation of fluid under the skin. This occurs most often with dogs that are very active immediately after surgery.”

Seroma fluid is watery in appearance, with pink tinges of blood. It is not dark, 100 percent blood. Sometimes it leaks out, but if it doesn't, a large squishy area will appear at the site. A seroma is no cause for alarm, but do call your vet if it gets large, and find out if the area should be drained in the office. Sometimes seromas need to be drained more than once, but often the body reabsorbs the fluid.

You will want to cover the incision site with a t-shirt or boxers to absorb the fluid, and cover your dog's bed with old towels. Giant breed dogs reportedly have excessive fluid leakage after surgery. Soak a paper towel with hydrogen peroxide to gently clean up around the incision.

Contact your vet immediately if you notice any [signs of infection](#) such as:

- Leakage
- Missing staples or [loose stitches](#)
- Foul smells coming from the area
- Tissues protruding from the incision

Recommended Reading:



[Seroma After-Surgery Care for Dogs](#)

Veterinary Seroma Information Article



[Incision Site Madness Post-op in Pets](#)

Dr. Patty Khuly Discusses Post-Op Incision Care

Tips for Reducing Seromas

To help seromas dissipate, Tripawd's favorite vet, Dr. Pam Wiltzius, suggests using a hot pack at the site.

"Cold packing is for swelling / inflammation. Hot packing is to help loosen muscles up prior to massage and the heat can also stimulate the body's cells to absorb the extra blood . . . If a seroma is going to burst there is not much you can do to prevent that and the heat can actually help bring the fluid to the surface which is what you want. Ideally a vet would have drained the fluid before it burst or put a drain tube in."

Hot compresses with a warm washcloth (5-10 minutes 2-3 times daily) should help encourage drainage and a compression bandage (changed daily) is also beneficial. We also recommend [Bella's Pain Relief Pack](#).

Bruising

Bruising happens as a result of skin, muscles and tissues being cut to remove the leg. The amputation site becomes traumatized by the leg removal, and [bruising often happens](#).

Relax — it's usually not as bad as it looks. The bruises can become an angry, dark purplish color but will fade over the next few weeks.

Recommended Reading



[Bruising After Surgery](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Post-Surgery Bruising](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Tripawds Discussion Forums: Hematomas?](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic

Leg Swelling

Some dogs may experience [circulation issues in their limbs](#) after surgery, most likely due to increased stress on the legs. Tripawds' veterinarian Dr. Wiltzius says "Other causes of edema include heart disease or tumor metastasis to the chest but this would be fairly rare."



Denali's Post-op Bruising

Better safe than sorry. Always call your vet to let them know this is happening. Meanwhile, there are some ways to help reduce swelling...

- Cold compresses
- When your dog is asleep, try putting a cushion under her leg, raising it slightly higher than the rest of her body
- Gentle massage of your dog's legs can also stimulate circulation



[Tripawd Jack Gets A Massage](#)

Recommended Reading



[Swollen Leg After Amputation](#)

Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic



[2 Days Post Op and Nova's Feet Are Swelling](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Post-Op Complication - Remaining Front Leg Swollen](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic

Going Potty

If you're wondering how your dog will eliminate on three legs, you're not alone. This seems to be one of the biggest concerns of most pawrents! But rest assured, dogs do figure this out a lot quicker than we can imagine. As my vet told my people, "When they need to go ... they'll go!" But sometimes it can take up to a few days, so don't be alarmed.

Many pain medications will cause constipation. Most dogs won't have a problem with urination, but will not have a bowel movement until anywhere from two to five days after surgery.

You can often expedite things by adding small amounts of any of the following to his food:

- Bran flakes
- Metamucil
- Canned (not spiced) pumpkin
- Warm milk
- Olive oil
- Steamed sweet potato
- Fish oils (sardines, mackerel, canned salmon or just a liquid supplement)
- Mineral oil (a miniscule amount works quickly)

The first few times he needs to eliminate, get ready to assist by placing the canvas sling under his belly, and use the handles to assist him out to his designated spot. Some dogs will allow you to do this, others will refuse. Don't force it; let your dog figure it out naturally. He may lose his balance, but will quickly regain it. You'll see. And there is no need to be embarrassed about being excited when your dog does his first doody. Tripawds members are often cheering this milestone in the discussion forums!



Jake's First Three Legged Potty Break

Recommended Reading



[Ahh the indignity of it](#)

Tripawds Members Discuss Elimination on Three Legs



[Constipation and intermittent pain?](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Is it an emergency?](#)

How to Tell if Your Dog Needs to Go to the E.R.



[What are the Treatments for Canine Constipation?](#)

eHow Article About Remedies for Constipation in Dogs



[New Tripawd Nikki Goes Potty](#)

Using a Homemade Sling

Some dogs will welcome your assistance with a handy [homemade sling](#), but others may not. Most dogs will usually only require this level of assistance during the first few days of recovery, if at all.

If necessary, use the sling handles (or the ends of the towel) to lift and assist her while ascending and descending stairs, and/or when going to the bathroom.

Remember to respect your own physical challenges too!

- Position yourself correctly by first standing on the side where the missing limb was located.
- Use your legs, not your back, to lift your dog into position.
- If you know you can't lift your dog's weight, finding a partner during the first few days after surgery is ideal.

And remember, if you become frustrated at [trying to maneuver your dog up off the floor](#), your dog will respond. Remain calm and don't force your dog into any positions he doesn't want to get into. When he wants to get up or has to go potty bad enough, he will go.



Helping your dogs too much will teach them to rely upon your assistance, and only prolong recovery. Let them heal on their own and provide support only when necessary.

Coping With Stairs

Always assist your dog when ascending or descending stairs during recovery. Use a large towel or sling until the incision is healed. Then, once stitches have been removed, a [quality dog harness](#) can be very helpful. Walk with your dog on the side of the missing limb, and keep a firm grip on the handle as you walk down the stairs.



Dogs missing a front limb will have a harder time going down stairs, while dogs who are missing a rear limb will find ascending stairs to be more difficult.

When your dog regains confidence and strength, he will learn to use the stairs on his own. If he is a wise dog, you may notice him leaning against the wall when descending for support. See how I did just that in my video to the right.



[Jerry Takes the Stairs](#)

Tripawds and Other Dogs

Many pawrents worry about how other dogs in the household may treat their new Tripawd. In the Tripawds Discussion Forums, pawrents have reported that when a Tripawd comes home, their canine siblings are often gentler than usual around the patient. Typically, rough-housing is kept to a minimum. Many pack mates instinctively understand when their sibling needs extra space to heal.

Tripawd pawrent Mary reports...

“The only thing that happened when Cemil came home was that the attachments re-aligned. He was the top dog and everybody’s favorite to play with; now Radzi and Mujde play with each other more. They’re still too careful of him to be much fun for him—they won’t body-slam.”

Tripawd pawrents should take comfort in knowing that nobody in our discussion forums has ever reported an injury due to siblings being too rough with the patient.

What happens more frequently is that siblings will show signs of depression, by not eating, reverting to bad, puppy-like behavior, or being clingy. Sue, a pawrent to Tripawd Nova, says that Nova’s sibling Emmy showed signs of depression:

“She has gained an enormous amount of weight, this is on a reduced-fat diet, and I have even been cutting her portions. She appears depressed and mopey a lot of the time.”



Emmy and Nova (Top)

Emmy’s vet believes that since Nova’s surgery, extra attention has been paid to Nova, at Emily’s expense. Perhaps Emmy’s weight gain is because Sue has been busy taking care of Nova. She may appear depressed because social interaction has been kept to a minimum as Sue has been shuffling Nova to the vet’s office. Emmy’s problem may be one of inactivity, instead of depression.

To avoid this situation, Tripawd parents recommend doing your best to find quality time to spend with your other dogs. Even just 15 minutes of ball-playing or walks with you alone can alleviate any feelings of being left out. Also, Tripawd pawrents may want to consider trying healing remedies such as: Rescue Remedy by Bach’s Flower Essences. [Rescue Remedy](#) is an all-natural, homeopathic calming agent made of flower essences. Rescue Remedy can give a sense of well-being to both dogs and humans alike.

Recommended Reading:



[Tripawd Siblings](#)

Tripawds Members with Multiple Dogs Discuss Feeling Left Out, Depression, etc.



[Bach’s Rescue Remedy](#)

Natural Homeopathic Stress Relief



[How Do Canine Siblings React?](#)

See How Some Pack Mates React to New Tripawds

Your Dog's Emotions

Some dogs might want to be left alone, in a quiet spot. Some might have poor appetite, [constipation](#) or nausea affected by pain medications and antibiotics. This may be accompanied by whining or crying. Usually it lasts just a couple of days, but only a vet can tell you if there might be unusual pain involved. Some true signs of discomfort, include a change in diet or refusal to eat, incontinence, or an inability to stand.

i In the wild, wolves will often leave the pack to hide somewhere cool and quiet and heal on their own. This is normal behavior for dogs on the mend too.

Upon returning home after surgery, some dogs will feel like [they can take on the world](#). Our advice is; don't let them. Many new Tripawds come home feeling really great from all the pain killers that are still in their system and will try to do too much. One or two days later, the dog will experience a dramatic crash in stamina. Some dogs will even tear their stitches from the pressure of moving around too much.

Your Tripawd might be very groggy, weak, and sleepy. That's normal. Let her rest and sleep well and don't force feed her. Just be sure to make water available to keep her hydrated. Chicken broth or Gatorade in the water will often help stimulate drinking. For dogs refusing to eat, [Honest Kitchen Ice Pups](#) treat mix is an excellent way to boost appetite and ensure they get plenty of nutrients in their water.

Recommended Reading:



[My Dog is Limping, But No Pain](#)

Dr. Dressler Discusses Signs of Pain in a Dog

Walking Your Tripawd

The first couple of days after coming home, your dog will need her rest. Confinement is key to a quick, safe recovery. The only walking your Tripawd should do upon returning home, is going outside to eliminate. Always leash up before going outside to limit activity.

After about two weeks – depending on your dog's condition – you can take more frequent, shorter walks. Start by just going a very short distance, and slowly increase walking time.

Don't overdo it! If your new Tripawd needs to rest, she has gone too far. Shorten the distance by half next time and continue increasing the distance again on subsequent walks.

i Focus on mobility [exercises and stretching](#) before taking your Tripawd on longer walks.

Whether you choose to use a [harness](#), flat collar, [prong](#), slip, or [head collar](#) on your Tripawd is up to you. We have found that for both rear leggers and front leggers, all of them will work fine; what matters more is your ability to keep up with your Tripawd on walks.

i Consider [interactive dog toys](#) and treat games to keep Tripawds from getting bored while confined during recovery.



[Wyatt Reviews the Gentle Leader](#)

CHAPTER 8: Pain Management for New Tripawds

The best way to help your dog heal is to keep her confined and as inactive as possible, with the help of painkillers and rest. According to VeterinaryPartner.com, you can help speed up healing by remembering:

- ❗ It is more effective to prevent pain than to alleviate existing pain (i.e., using pain medications in anticipation of pain is more effective than waiting until the pain already exists).

Continuous delivery of pain relief is more effective than periodic administration of pain relief.

As soon as your dog comes home from the hospital, he will still have surgery anesthesia medicine running through his body. Some dogs will sleep as soon as they're home, but we see many dogs come home high as a kite, thinking they can do anything. They'll run amok and carry on, only to crash hard the next few days. They'll pay for the over activity with sore muscles and possibly swelling around the surgery site. It's in your dog's best interest to limit his activity as much as possible during the first week or two he is home.

Nearly every new Tripawd parent reports that their dogs pant, whine, cry, moan, pace, refuse to eat and just act weird for the first few nights after surgery. Many dogs may seem depressed and won't want to eat, and they'll be constipated, sometimes for up to a week!

- ❗ The first two weeks of recovery will be difficult, but chances are, most unexpected behavioral changes are due to side effects of the pain medications your dog is taking.

Remember that whenever you take a pain pill, you know what to expect; your dog, however, has no idea that painkillers can make him see pink elephants and feel doopy. The resulting behavior is lethargy, confusion and what you might consider to be depression.

Most times, what humans think is depression could actually just be the dog's reaction to the pain meds, along with your own fears. We're not saying that your dog isn't feeling badly, because he is. But that sad look on his face isn't anger or regret over the amputation – dogs simply don't possess an understanding of such complex human emotions. If your dog seems depressed, it's probably because he is feeling lousy after surgery, and reflecting back your own feelings of sadness and fear.

You can help your dog recover faster by not coddling him, or feeling sorry for him. Remember that dogs pick up on their leader's emotions, and how you act is how he will respond. For the fastest recovery, it's important to create as normal a home situation as possible. It's understandable that you want to help him, but hand feeding him when he's laying down or carrying him will not improve his chances for a normal life.



Pain Medication Often Makes Dogs Act Strange

Tough Love During Recovery

Many pawrents are inclined to help their dog do everything during recovery. They will sleep with them on the floor, carry them outside, and run to assist them at any sign of discomfort. As heartbreaking as it may be to see your pup struggle, doing so can be detrimental to their healing process and actually prolong recovery. [Dr. Amy Kramer of California Animal Rehab](#) suggests a good dose of “Tough Love” when it comes to [caring for recovering Tripawds](#). She says...

“You gotta make the dog do it. If it means you have to support them a little bit while they learn how to get their balance, that’s fine. But what you want to do is normalize that dog, not baby them. You want to teach them how to function normally, rather than baby them, because that’s when they start to get lazy.”

They’re like “Why should I get up to eat, Mom’s going to bring me my food? Why should I get up to go outside, Mom’s going to carry me!”

*We call it **tough love**. If you want your dog to get back to normal, you gotta start from the beginning and not treat them like they’re disabled or invalid. Treat them like normal.”*

Recommended Reading



[Dog Depression after Surgery](#)

[Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forums Topic](#)



[Mourning the loss of his limb](#)

[Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forums Topic](#)



[Canine Rehabilitation](#)

[Amputation Recovery Advice from California Animal Rehab Doctors](#)



[Amputation Recovery Advice from CARE](#)

Common Pain Medications and Side Effects

Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)

NSAIDs such as Deramaxx, Rimadyl, Metacam, etc. can help successfully treat arthritis and post-surgery pain in the majority of dogs. While most dogs do fine with these drugs, some can experience [severe side effects](#) that if not treated immediately and quickly, can escalate into a life threatening emergency. Please watch for these NSAID side effects:

- Decrease or increase in appetite
- Vomiting
- Change in bowel movements (diarrhea, or black, tarry, or bloody stools)
- Change in behavior (decreased or increased activity level, incoordination, seizure or aggression)
- Yellowing of gums, skin, or whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- Change in drinking habits (frequency, amount consumed)
- Change in urination habits (frequency, color, or smell)
- Change in skin (redness, scabs, or scratching)

Recommended Reading:**[Advice to Dog Owners Whose Pets Take NSAIDs](#)***Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug Information from VeterinaryPartner.com***[On Metacam, Rimadyl, and their NSAID-ish side-effects](#)***Dr. Patty Khuly Discusses Breed Specific Side Effects***Amantadine**

Also known by the brand names: Adekin, Amanta, Amantagamma, Amantan, Amantrel, Amixx, Antadine, Antiflu-DES, Atarin, Atenegine, Cerebramed, Endantadine, Infectoflu, Inlu-A, Lysovir, Mantadine, Mantadix, Mantidan, Padiken, Symadine, Viroifral and Virucid. According to VeterinaryPartner.com, [Amantadine](#) alone is not an effective analgesic but when combined with other pain relievers, it adds an extra dimension of pain relief. In the simplest terms, it helps alleviate pain that's made worse due to stress and anxiousness. Side effects can include diarrhea, flatulence, and agitation. In humans, it reportedly has caused hallucinations, dizziness, and other forms of mental side effects.

Tripawds member veterinarian Dr. Wilztius says...

“Amantadine helps prevent what is called pain “wind up”. Once the pain receptors are annoyed it takes more pain meds to calm them down. This drug blocks that response and can be used for 1-2 weeks post op. Lots of dogs with chronic arthritis also take this drug for flare-ups when the Rimadyl or other NSAIDs they are taking stop working.”

VeterinaryPartner.com adds...

“Probably the biggest concern is that this medication is fairly new to veterinary use and a full catalog of what to expect with its use is not yet available. Right now Amantadine is growing in popularity for pets and may prove to be an excellent complement to many pain relief regimens.

In human medicine caution is recommended when considering its use in patients with kidney disease, seizure disorders, active psychoses, liver disease, or congestive heart failure. This means that side effects are more likely in these situations.”

Gabapentin

Also known by its brand name, Neurontin, [Gabapentin](#) is an anti-seizure drug that vets use in animals before surgery, to minimize pain experienced after surgery. Because it can successfully treat neuropathic pain (the burning and tingling sensations that come from damaged nerves), Gabapentin is also used to minimize post-amputation [phantom limb pain](#).

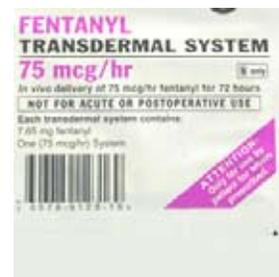
Side effects are rare but can include sedation, diarrhea and a condition known as ataxia, a neurological condition that causes muscles to stop working together. Do not abruptly stop giving Gabapentin; this drug must be tapered off to avoid severe rebound pain. Also, never give your dog the human form of Gabapentin. This version contains Xylitol and can be toxic to dogs.



Gabapentin has proven to be effective in the treatment of [phantom limb pain in dogs](#).

Fentanyl

A [Fentanyl patch](#) provides a continuous dose of pain medication to dogs after surgery. Fentanyl is a narcotic, similar to opium and morphine. Fentanyl patches can cause effects such as drowsiness, euphoria, addictiveness, diarrhea control, respiratory depression and hallucinations. Upon application it may take up to 12 hours to reach full effect in your dog, but once it does the patch will deliver pain relief for four days. Side effects can also include vomiting, nausea and constipation. The most serious potential side effect is respiratory depression (not breathing properly). Other effects can include unusual weakness or drowsiness. Heat will increase the side effects, please don't let your dog lay next to a heat source when wearing a Fentanyl patch. This patch can be fatal if swallowed. Call your vet if your dog experiences any of these side effects.



Tramadol

The brand name of [Tramadol](#) is "Ultram." This is a non-addictive, non-sedating pain reliever that can be used in conjunction with NSAID medications. It is considered safe for dogs with kidney and liver issues.

Do not use Tramadol with:

- The liver and joint support nutraceutical [SAMe](#) (not enough studies have been done to prove this combination is safe)
- L-Deprenyl (to control Cushing's syndrome or senility)
- Psychoactive drugs such as serotonin re-uptake inhibitors, tricyclic antidepressants, or monoamine oxidase inhibitors. If you are not sure if your pet is on one of these medications, check with your veterinarian.
- Amitraz, the active ingredient in the Preventic tick control collar, Promeris Canine, a flea and tick control product and also used to treat demodectic mange.

The most commonly reported side effect of Tramadol is heavy panting. Other side effects considered rare can include upset stomach, pupil constriction, decreased heart rate (usually not a life-threatening problem), constipation, sedation and bizarre behavior. If this happens, call your vet immediately to discuss reducing the dosage or switching medication.

Butorphanol

Brand names of [Butorphanol](#) include Stadol, Torbutrol and Torbugesic. Butorphanol is best described as being similar to codeine; in small doses it is a cough suppressant, but in larger doses it's an analgesic pain reliever. It's a very short acting drug (up to an hour) and is typically used in combination with another pain reliever. According to [VeterinaryPartner.com](#), "Butorphanol has some anti-nausea properties and is commonly used in this way prior to the administration of cisplatin in cancer chemotherapy." It is sometimes used as a mild pre-anesthetic tranquilizer.

Butorphanol's main side effect is sedation but it can also cause diarrhea or appetite loss. While it can slow breathing, this shouldn't have an effect on otherwise healthy dogs.

Butorphanol should not be used in patients with: liver disease, kidney failure, hypothyroidism, hypoadrenocorticism (Addison's disease), head trauma, hydrocephalus, or in very debilitated patients.

Buprenorphine

[Buprenorphine](#) is even less common as a post-surgery pain reliever than butorphanol. This drug is in the same class as morphine, but for at-home care is given as an oral spray. It is absorbed in the mouth and doesn't have to be swallowed. Possible side effects include drowsiness, a drop in heart rate as well as blood pressure. Buprenorphine should not be used in patients with liver disease or patients with respiratory trauma.

Recommended Reading:



[Pain Relief Drugs for Dogs](#)

Veterinary Partner Article for Informed Pet Owners



[Doing Better Without Fentanyl](#)

Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Are there any side effects that pain and pain relievers don't share?](#)

Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic

Chapter 9: Recovery

Prevent Scratching at the Incision

Your vet will probably send you home with an [Elizabethan Collar](#), aka, "[The Cone of Shame](#)." This is to prevent your dog from bothering his incision. While e-collars make our dogs look pathetic, it's so important to ensure that your dog wears it continuously while the incision heals (generally for two weeks). Excessive licking or scratching can tear stitches and cause serious bacterial infections.

Realistically, not all dogs will tolerate the traditional plastic Cone. [Alternative surgery site protection devices](#) include:



Panda Gets the "[Cone of Shame](#)"

- The **Inflatable Pro Collar** – a donut-shaped, inflatable collar that goes around your dog's neck but doesn't block your Tripawd's peripheral vision.
- The **Comfy Cone** – which looks just like a traditional Elizabethan "satellite dish" collar but is made of soft fabric.
- The **Bite Not Collar** – wraps snugly around the animal's neck to help protect rear limb wounds.

Some tips for preventing your dog from bothering the incision include:

- **Modify a Muzzle:** Put the upper part of pantyhose over the cage part and secure it with tape.
- **Use a Bath Towel:** Loosely secure a large rolled towel around your dog's neck (not too loose that she can slip away). The thick towel can serve as a barrier between her neck/chin and the incision.
- A special sock like [Power Paws Traction Socks for Dogs](#) or dog boots like Ruff Wear's [Grip Trex and Skyliner](#) can be used to keep your dog's paws from scratching at the site, but dogs with degenerative mobility issues should not use them.

As stitches heal the skin will become dry and your dog will want to scratch at them. If you see this starting to happen you can try:

- An anti-inflammatory spray such as [Dermacool Hc](#).
- Over the counter medicines to relieve itching, such as Benadryl and Chlorpheniramine
- Some vets recommend using ointment such as Neosporin
- Homeopathic remedies suggested in [The Whole Pet Diet](#), include Calendula, Comfrey and Myrrh which all have antiseptic and healing properties.

Recommended Reading

-  [Licking Incision](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum
-  [Scratching incision area with hind leg?](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum
-  [Cone of Shame Alternatives](#)
New and Improved Elizabethan Collar Wound Protection Options
-  [Dog Paw Traction Solutions](#)
Tripawds Gear Blog Reviews Tagged "Boots"



Calpurnia

Phantom Limb Pain

If you notice your dog crying out, twitching, whining, having muscle spasms and licking where his leg was, chances are he is experiencing [Phantom Limb Pain](#). Phantom pains are a common occurrence in dogs (and humans) after amputation surgery. They can set in weeks after surgery and last as long as a month, sometimes longer.

Phantom pains are pain and sensations in the missing limb. Tripawds friend [Calpurnia](#) says:

“Because the brain is expecting input from the missing limb and not getting any, it sends a sort of panic signal that is interpreted as pain. One way that we might be able to help the brain re-map itself is to increase circulation and provide gentle stimulus...”

For more helpful information, please review these [Tips for Managing Phantom Limb Pain in Dogs](#) in the [Tripawds Downloads](#) blog. Ask your vet about the prescription drug [Gabapentin](#) if phantom pain persists.

Recommended Reading:

-  [Tremor and Spasm](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic
-  [Screaming Yelp!](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic
-  [2+ Months Post Op, Body Twitches...pain?](#)
Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic
-  [Frequent Whining One Month Post Amputation Surgery](#)
Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic
-  [Post Surgery Medication and Phantom Pain](#)
Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic

Confinement

We recommend installing an adjustable pet gate in the doorway of a room where your new Tripawd can heal safely. Fully [functional pet barriers](#) are also available to fit many hallway widths, some with built-in gates for easy pass-through.

Confining her to a room where she can [see what's going on but feel safe enough to fall asleep](#) in is an ideal situation. Restricting her activities for at least two weeks after surgery will help her heal faster. However, if you have other dogs in the pack this may be a challenge.

Pet gates are also helpful at the top and bottom of every accessible staircase. While Tripawds will eventually learn how to navigate steps on their own, you'll want to limit stair climbing during the first few weeks to minimize the risk of post-surgical swelling and tearing of the incision.

We recommend [Pet Gear dog crates](#) for post-op confinement. These larger crates have a wide “garage door” style opening that allows easy access for recovering Tripawds. Ideally, your dog is already crate-trained and comfortable being confined. The natural instinct of dogs to leave the pack and find a quiet place to heal on their own may make confinement easy even if she is not crate trained. Consider these [long lasting treats and interactive dog toys](#) to keep recovering Tripawds from getting bored while being confined.

Finally, a [portable pet exercise pen](#) will prove helpful for keeping your recovering Tripawd confined but safely nearby. Move the pen to the living room so she can be with you, without jumping all over the furniture. Move it outside with you so she can enjoy the outdoors without overdoing it during recuperation.



[Pet Gear crate](#) opens wide to allow easy entry for Wyatt.

Recommended Reading



[Confinement is Key to Safe recovery](#)

Recommended Pet Gates, Crates, and Portable Pens to Keep Recovering Tripawds Safe

Entertainment Ideas for the Confined Tripawd

Veterinarians agree that pet confinement is important for safe recovery after any major surgery. But keeping active pups from going bonkers while cooped up and on the mend can be a challenge. Luckily, there are lots of new toys that can [keep your dog entertained for hours](#).

Tripawd Mom Laura says...

“I found raw soup bones are an inexpensive option and can be kept in the freezer. They contain the beneficial bone marrow but are messy and not allowed in the house. A less messy option, but more expensive, are beef or bison tendons. In particular the Achilles tendon which is really tough.

There is some discussion about the potential benefits of the natural joint supplements that are found in tendons. Rawhides are FORBIDDEN for my dogs due to the choking hazard, the chemicals, and the complication of the undigested rawhide “balling” up in their stomach. I make sure that none of the treats are smoked or have any preservatives.”

As for Fortis, he goes bonkers over coconuts! His Dad, Brett says:

“I just give him the whole hairy coconut! He goes nuts over it! He kicks it all over the yard using his paws and snout. I’m not kidding, the great Pele would be impressed. It’s almost as if he is angry at the bloody coconut. Finally he tires of this, squats down and rips the husk off (not anymore of course). Once he cracks the nut open and gets a taste of the milk.....it’s game over!”

Discussion about [other safe, interactive treats and toys](#) that your dog can spend hours with can be found in the Tripawds forums.

There are also games you can play with your dog, that don’t involve running or jumping. [Laurie Bryce’s TPLO surgery website](#) includes an introductory lesson in clicker principle training, and features games you can play with your dog during the recovery phase.

Recommended Reading



[Kong / Longer Lasting Treats?](#)

Tripawds Eating Healthy Discussion Forum Topic



[Keep Recovering Dogs Entertained for Hours](#)

Recommended interactive Dog Toys and Long Lasting Treats



[Our TPLO Experience](#)

Low Impact Games for Recovering Dogs



[Everlasting Treat Balls](#)



For more specific details about recovery after your dog’s amputation, review these previous sections about [Preparing Your Home](#), [Surgery Wound Care](#), [Swelling and Bruising](#), [Elimination](#), [Using a Sling](#), [Pain Management](#), [“Tough Love”](#), [Medications and Side Effects](#).

Chapter 10: The New Normal

For Tripawds and their people, life after amputation is a process of adapting to the “new normal” of:

- Brisk walks — Tripawds find it easier to hop along at a quick pace.
- Shorter, more frequent walks which are better than long ones.
- Decreased stamina — Many dogs may tire more easily, but others (small breeds or those without cancer) might not.
- Being the center of attention — Everyone wants to know what happened to your dog.
- Carefully considering distance — What used to take you 15 minutes may now take 30 because of all of the breaks your pup will need to take.
- Inspiring others to be the best they can despite any adversity.
- Living in the Now — For those with cancer dogs, the greatest gift this disease brings is an understanding that what matters most is **quality** of life, not quantity.



[Water Rover Sport Bottle for Dogs](#)

Who Has it Harder? Front Leggers or Rear Leggers?

Therapists agree that since [dogs carry 60 percent of their weight on their front limbs](#), front legged Tripawds have to work harder than rear legged Tripawds. But for both types of Tripawds, you'll need to keep close tabs on how far they walk and ensure that you [carry plenty of water](#) while taking lots of breaks, especially during the recovery period.

We encourage you to explore the [benefits of physical therapy](#) with a canine rehabilitation specialist to ensure that your dog's new gait is not worsening any pre-existing health issues, such as osteoarthritis or hip dysplasia. Even dogs without health issues like these can benefit from physical therapy sessions that will safely build up stamina and endurance soon after surgery.

Recommended Reading



[Canine Rehabilitation](#)

Post-op Exercises and Stretches with California Animal Rehabilitation



[Tripawd Max Does Swimmably Well, Even After Hip Replacements](#)

Physical Therapy for Three Legged Rottweiler



[Situational Rear Limb Weakness](#)

Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic



[Tripawds Three-Part Video Interview with California Animal Rehab](#)

Chapter 11: Assistive Devices



Please note that Tripawds will only resell products that we believe in. While there are a number of harnesses, boots, beds and other [gear available for dogs](#), the following products are ones we stand behind 100 pawcent because of their quality, comfort and exceptional customer service by the manufacturers.

If you intend to purchase an assistive device such as a [Ruff Wear harness](#), [dog stroller](#) or [boots](#), you may want to introduce them ahead of time before surgery. Introducing your dog to these items ahead of time could make coping with post-op healing while using a strange new device much easier for your dog.

Harnesses

If you have a high clearance vehicle, stairs in your house, or a large dog you suspect might need extra help in getting around after surgery, the right harness can be indispensable. When I got sick, my pawrents had no idea how they were going to help me and my 75 pounds navigate the 18 steps connecting our home above and our office below.

We discovered the [Ruff Wear harness](#) by accident, and fell in love with it as soon as we realized that the handle could be used to lift me up and give me a boost when I needed it. Once I started wearing it, the harness helped me feel more comfortable learning how to go down stairs, and Mom and Dad were able to help me get up into our truck so we could go on adventures again!



Jerry Models the [Ruff Wear Webmaster Harness](#)

New Tripawd Spokesdog Wyatt Ray is a rear-leg amputee who also finds the harness useful, especially on slippery floors, and for getting in and out of vehicles. We recommend keeping the harness on your dog all day, and removing it at night. There will undoubtedly be times when you wish he was wearing it.

The trick to harnesses is, they are most helpful when you least expect to need them.

We have found no “perfect” harness for all Tripawds. But we believe these are the best, each with their own pros and cons. There are two harnesses we highly recommend:

- The [Ruff Wear Webmaster Harness](#) — An all purpose support harness for dogs without serious rear-end mobility issues.
- The [AST Get-a-Grip Harness](#) — A full body “Pet Support Suit” from Animal Suspension Technologies recommended for large dogs and those in need of more rear end support.

We recommend not using any harness until the incision has completely healed and stitches or staples are removed. Please consult your veterinarian with any concerns.

We have heard of no specific cases where a harness has hampered healing, but we believe direct pressure from the straps may irritate the wound. Until the area is healed, we suggest using a soft towel slung under the belly or a homemade [canvas shopping bag sling](#) if additional support is required.

The Ruff Wear Webmaster Harness

After your Tripawd’s stitches heal, a [Ruff Wear Harness](#) will provide support, comfort and full range of motion for your pup with fleece-lined, padded chest and belly straps. The sturdy webbing straps and strong assistance handle help you lift your dog when assistance is needed.

Because the Webmaster harness was originally designed for search and rescue dogs to assist them onto chair lifts and into helicopters, it has space for two front legs. If your front-leg Tripawd has a smooth coat, the harness may have a tendency to slide around the chest after activity. This is purely aesthetic, since it is easily adjusted and still perfectly functional.

An Extra Harness Benefit for Front Leg Amputees:

Senior Tripawds have a harder time getting up off the floor, especially on smooth surfaces. Laying down can also be a challenge. By grasping the handle on the Web Master harness, you can lift your Tripawd up off the floor, as well as prevent him from sliding down too quickly onto the floor (which can also help ease the pain of hygromas, or elbow sores).

For rear leg amputees, the harness will be most beneficial during travel when you need to safely get your dog in and out of the car, navigate stairs or approach a slippery surface — at the vet’s office, for example, or in a retail store.



[Ruff Wear Harness Review and Demo Video](#)



Help tired dogs up and down with a [Ruff Wear harness](#).

Ruff Wear's Web Master harness construction is sturdy, breathable and has reflective piping for high visibility during night-time walks. Please review our [Ruff Wear Harness Product Review and Demo Video](#) for complete details and sizing instructions.

Actual feedback from Ruff Wear harness users...

“The Ruff Wear Harness is a great investment for helping them around long term. I didn't have one for Trouble until her age and arthritis started to take a toll. It is so valuable in assisting her getting in and out of the vehicle and on surfaces where her footing is not so stable.”

— Trouble's Mom, Shanna (Orange, TX)

“Chuy (2yrs. old) also wears his harness whenever we take him out for a walk or somewhere in the car. Keep the harness handy, it is a wonderful tool to have to help your dog. It helps make it so much easier to get them in and out of a vehicle, up stairs or just to help pick them up if they fall down. Best investment besides carpet runners that we've made for Chuy.”

— Chuy's Mom, Eleanor (Phoenix, AZ)

“Just my two cents. I can't help but feel the use of a harness on most all tripawds especially seniors may help in reducing the odds of injuring one of the remaining legs. Fortis wears a harness at all times except for shut down time at night.

Fortis injured his remaining leg two weeks post op. I can't help but feel a harness might have at least given him more time before the injury occurred. The first two weeks after surgery Fortis was doing amazingly well according to his vet (he laughed at me when I asked if I needed a harness). I sure wish I would have had one.”

— Fortis' Dad, Brett (Austin, TX)

“I have no advice, just an amusing harness story – while Jack was recovering, I ordered the Ruff Wear harness since I had heard it was good for helping our dogs get up and move around. Well, as Jack started to recover, I noticed that he didn't really need any extra support. However, the harness looks cute on him and he gets lots of comments on it, so we continued to use it.

Now, 5 months later, I have actually started to use the handle ... only instead of for support, I use it to hold him back from running to play with other dogs while on a walk and from jumping on people because he wants to play. I also use it to help when he decides he wants to jump up (and then down!) something really really high.”

— Captain Jack's Mom, Laura (Kirkland, WA)

Recommended Reading



[To Wear or Not to Wear ... the Harness](#)

Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic



[Need Help to Stop Leash Pulling](#)

Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic



[Ruff Wear Harness Product Review](#)

Webmaster Harness Demonstration Video



Wyatt Gets A Lift with the [AST Get A Grip Harness](#)

The Get-a-Grip Dog Harness

As an alternative to the Ruff Wear Webmaster harness, especially for dogs requiring additional support, we believe the good folks at Animal Suspension Technologies have met that need with their [Get A Grip harness](#).

This full body harness is a great choice for big-boned, three legged amputee dogs who need extra support, and pawrents who need more leverage in moving their Tripawd around.

Animal Suspension Technologies began making harnesses with the custom Pet Support Suit that Jerry demonstrated. If you have a hard-to-fit Tripawd (i.e., deep chested or short bodied dogs), the custom Pet Support Suit is a good choice. For dogs with an average build, the Get A Grip Harness is a terrific ready-made solution for immediate surgery recovery needs and mobility assistance. Without straps to interfere with incision healing this harness should be OK to use on amputee dogs immediately after surgery, but please consult your veterinarian with any concerns.

The Get A Grip is comfortable, and easy to put on, even while lying down. Just place the padding under his belly, wrap it around his body, and clip into place. There's no need to put your Tripawd's paws through individual leg loops. You may need to adjust the straps upon first wearing it, but after that, you won't need to hassle with fittings.

Get A Grip is Great for Giant Breed Dogs

If your big dog needs a full-body hoist, this is the right harness. The patented "AST X-Belly Straps" cross under the body, connecting the front and rear support straps. The straps create a sling effect that lifts the whole dog at once. The wrap-around design helps the harness to stay centered on your dog, and ensures that as you lift him, the center of gravity stays centered directly underneath his belly. AST also makes custom Pet Support Suits for even larger dogs, or those requiring special fitting.

The downsides to the Get A Grip and Pet Support Suit harnesses are that they are not really suited for active dogs. The handles are too long to be left on during activity. And although the fabric is extremely strong and durable, the fabric thickness may pose a problem in hot climates.



[AST Get A Grip Harness Demo Video](#)



[Jerry Demonstrates Custom AST Pet Support Suit](#)

Rear-End Support Harnesses

Dogs with rear end mobility issues have additional challenges when it comes to assistive devices. They may need more hindquarters support than the Ruff Wear harness can offer, but not require the full-belly wraparound design of the Get-A-Grip.

One potential solution is the [Help 'em Up Harness](#) by Blue Dog Designs. The Help 'Em Up Harness stands out from others because of its unique "Hip Lift" design, which allows pawrents to safely and comfortably lift the entire pelvis at once.



[Help 'em Up Harness](#) from Blue Dog Designs

With a handle on the front section, and one on the back, the Help 'em Up harness distributes weight over large padded surfaces, allowing pawrents to lift the areas of greatest mass; the chest, and hind-quarters.

The Help 'em Up is the best harness available designed specifically to support a dog's hindquarters. If you believe your Tripawd can benefit from this type of harness design, please read our [full product review](#) and see [Wyatt's demo video](#). For certain drawbacks of the Help 'em Up harness, consider this [user submitted review](#).



[Help 'em Up Harness Demo Video](#)

i Please contact [Blue Dog Designs](#) directly if you feel the Help 'em Up Harness is right for you since it is no longer available in the [Tripawds Gear Shop](#).

Recommended Reading



[Give Your Tripawd a Lift](#)

Help 'Em Up Mobility Harness Product Review



[Help 'em Up Harness No Longer Available Here](#)

User-Submitted Review of Help 'em Up Harness



[Help 'em Up Harness Demo Video](#)

Rear Leg Tripawd Wyatt Demonstrates the Help 'em Up Harness

Dog Boots

Many Tripawds can be helped by wearing boots, but please note that some Tripawds shouldn't wear them at all. [Dr. Jessica Waldman](#) told us that she believes dogs with degenerative nerve issues shouldn't wear boots, because the soles impair their already limited ability to sense where their feet are.

But for Tripawds without mobility issues, boots can be a great assistive aid, if the dog will tolerate wearing them. Some dogs easily adapt after just a couple of short sessions with them on, but some hate them forever and will do whatever it takes to get them off their feet. Some dogs have feet just the right size for them, and other paws are impawisible to fit, especially for Greyhounds and Poodles.

Our experience has been that booties help Tripawds who are willing to get used to them, but the boots must be properly fitted to work and avoid tripping hazards.



Pressure Sore on Tazzie's Paw Pad



[PAWz Disposable & Reusable Dog Boots](#)

PAWz Natural Rubber Dog Booties

If you're curious to see how your Tripawd handles boots but want to begin with a smaller investment, [PAWz Dog Boots](#) are a smart choice. At less than \$20 for three sets of these disposable foot covers, they're a great way to see if your dog will tolerate having something on her feet.

PAWz Dog Boots are natural rubber booties that slip over your dog's paws. They're easy to put on, like a balloon, because they don't require zippers or Velcro closures. PAWz are fairly inexpensive, reusable, waterproof and offer great paw protection on

all types of terrain, hot cold, wet and slippery surfaces. PAWz are tough but thin enough to fold up and carry in your pocket. With three PAWz in your pocket, you'll always be prepared for unexpected slippery surfaces.

- ❗ [PAWz dog boots](#) are best suited for providing traction on slippery surfaces. Keep some on hand for trips to the vet or retail stores where three legged dogs risk falling due to lack of traction. Individual sets are not intended for long term outdoor use.

Ruff Wear Bark'n Boots

If you're confident that your dog will wear shoes, we recommend the ultra-durable [Ruff Wear Bark'n Boots](#). These shoes have slip-resistant, rugged soles and are constructed with quality materials that will last for many years. Bark'n Boots will provide the confidence your Tripawd needs to walk on all types of surfaces, from granite rocks and beach sand, to snow or hot asphalt. Ruff Wear Bark'n Boots provide the best all purpose protection available for a dog's feet.

[Skyliner Bark'n Boots](#) improve traction and mobility while helping protect tender paws on paved streets where hot pavement, street chemicals, or other hazards exist. [Grip Trex Bark'n Boots](#) are ideal for use on rough or rocky terrain and provide excellent traction on slippery surfaces.

You can purchase [Bark'n Boots Sock Liners](#) to use with the boots — and they are much more than a fashion statement! We believe these liners help keep the boots solidly on your dog's feet and prevent them from rotating. Liners also seem to facilitate putting on the boots, while providing a more comfortable fit and absorbing sweat.

- ❗ When fitting Bark'n Boots, measure your dog's feet carefully. If you're off just a bit, it could mean the difference between well-fitting boots and ones that could rotate around feet, causing a tripping hazard.



Wyatt Can Go Anywhere In His [Grip Trex Dog Boots](#) from Ruff Wear



[Ruff Wear Bark'n Boots Demo Video](#)

Getting Your Dog Used to Shoes

To introduce your dog to the idea of wearing shoes, first lay him down. Then, feed him treats as you quickly slide the liners and shoes on his feet. If you have someone who can assist, try putting them on while he's standing up. Have your assistant gently hoist up by his harness strap (preferably while feeding treats) while you put the liners and boots on. Fasten the ankle straps tightly, and your dog is good to go.

Start slowly. We recommend putting the boots on your dog for a few brief sessions, before leaving them on for more than a half hour or so. Our Wyatt only tolerates them for a few hours at a time (even after a year of regular use).

And again, remember, not all dogs will wear boots. While Spirit Jerry would never allow us to put anything on his feet, Wyatt Ray doesn't mind and runs like a gazelle when he wears them. Perhaps some dogs feel more confident when they're bare-pawed, while some don't notice the difference. You never know how your dog will react until you try.

If possible, get your dog used to the boots before his surgery. Start just by feeding treats while playing with his feet. If they do work for your dog, you'll wonder how you ever got along without them.

Bella's Pain Relief Pack

Several months after Spirit Jerry's surgery, he began limping badly on his right rear leg. His doctor thought perhaps [he might have a torn ACL](#). We opted to treat it with [acupuncture](#) and hot/cold therapy to wait it out.

One night we got creative and attempted to secure an ice pack to his hock, using an Ace bandage. That didn't work so well. We quickly learned that Ace bandages designed for humans are not made for a dog's anatomy.

Then we discovered the [Bella's Hot/Cold Pain Relief Pack](#). This unique heating pad / ice pack is designed specifically for dogs. And in addition to being a hot or cold pack, because it easily attaches to your dog's body it can act as a cover up for incisions and other areas where your dog might start obsessively licking.

The primary purpose is to provide heat or cold to sore, tired muscles and bones. The Bella's Pack is a safe alternative to electric heating pads, and stays on your dog with elastic Velcro straps. It comes in a fabric pouch that you can tighten around the affected area of your dog's body, and is easily chilled in the freezer or warmed in the microwave.

But how do you know if you should apply heat or ice?

According to Dr. Jessica Waldman of [California Animal Rehabilitation](#) in Los Angeles, most dogs who are in pain will prefer ice over heat. Your dog may be different, so we suggest following the advice of physiologists who practice sports medicine:

- If there is swelling and pain use ice.
- If there is no swelling, but stiffness is present use heat.
- If this is an acute injury (within first 6 weeks) use ice.
- When in doubt, use ice or moist heat.

Tripawds member Chris says...

“One of my smartest purchases for Bonnie's post-surgery care was a hot/cold package from Bella's Pain Relief... It is a thin gel pack, that does not stay cold for hours, so you have to put it back in the freezer. But the best thing about it is that it comes in a cover/envelope that has two velcro straps attached. It straps in place and stays put even when the dog moves. Bonnie loved it and I did too. It protected her stitches somewhat and I did not have to worry about her getting to her wound when I had it in place. The cover is washable and it really helps.”

Recommended Reading



[Hot/Cold Relief Pack Eases Pain, Speeds Recovery](#)

Product Review and Demonstration Video



[Pain Relief Pack Good for My ACL Tear!](#)

Tips for Using Bella's Pain Relief Pack on Dog's Rear Leg



Jerry Enjoys Cool Pain Relief On His Arthritic Hips



[Bella's Hot/Cold Pain Relief Pack](#) helped soothe Jerry's partial ACL tear.



[Bella's Pain Relief Pack Video Review](#)

Life Jackets for Swimming Tripawds

Some dogs love swimming almost as much as they enjoy chasing tennis balls. Many pawrents of new Tripawds mistakenly assume that their Tripawd will never be able to swim again.

But I'm here to tell you, Tripawds can really swim! This is true even for front-leg amputees like me. I loved swimming before I lost my leg, and when I got bone cancer, my pawrents thought my swimming days were over, but I decided to prove them wrong. The first time I went to a river as a Tripawd with my folks, I was just barely a few months past my amputation, and my parents were so nervous about letting me play near water. But once they saw how fearless I was on the beach, they started tossing sticks into the water. Each time, I swam out to get them and each time I made it back just fine.



Jerry Goes Swimming Without Worry in His [Float Coat from Ruff Wear](#)



[Jerry's First Three-Legged Swim](#)

Back then, my pawrents had never heard of a life jacket for dogs. For the next year I just kept on enjoying the water, until the time came when I started slowing down. One time they noticed me swallowing too much water, and again they thought my swimming days were over. That's when my pawrents found the [Ruff Wear Float Coat](#).

What a difference that made! I could swim farther and longer than even before those nasty mets started growing in my lungs. My head stayed above water and I never once pooped out before swimming to shore.

Why we love the [Ruff Wear Big Eddy and Portage Float Coats](#):

- Quick release buckles make it easy to put on and remove
- Goes on easily: no need to put your dog's legs into holes
- Strategically placed PVC-free buoyancy cells support dogs in a natural horizontal swimming position. Tripawds will not tip over when swimming.
- Athletic fit and armhole design will not compromise range of motion



[Float Coat Demo Video](#)

i The [Association of Canine Water Therapy](#) endorses the Ruff Wear Float Coat and offers some great tips for [selecting a swim therapy center](#).

Swimming Tips for Tripawds

[Swimming is great therapy](#) because it's a non-weight bearing exercise. This means that the buoyancy from water allows your Tripawd to exercise without putting strain on her joints. With a dog life jacket like the [Float Coat](#), you're giving your dog extra buoyancy and lift in the water, which allows her to work on strengthening her muscles instead of just using them to stay afloat. Dogs who swim will enjoy greater range of motion, decreased pain and more confidence in their ability to perform athletic maneuvers.

Don't try swim therapy until you consult with your vet to see if your dog is a candidate. Also be sure to review our [Fitness Tips from CARE](#).

What Pawrents Are Saying About the Ruff Wear Float Coats

Various Tripawds members have mentioned how the Float Coat has made a huge difference in their three legged water dog's swimming abilities...

“We got the Ruff Wear Float Coat specifically because it had an area of flotation in the front chest area that we thought would help him keep above water better and it did.” — [macsmom](#)

“As a Newfie dog, swimming has always been the best exercise... So we could not wait till that day where Oslo would be back in the water... life jacket is a must! It helped him a lot.” — [oslomoka](#)

“[Jake's float coat](#) definitely helped him alot in the pool! It helped him balance while swimming and also had a handle that I used to help him in and out of the pool.” — [jakesmom](#)

“[Fortis](#) now wears the Portage float coat by Ruff Wear. My main reason for opting to use a float was of course safety. But what I discovered is that the float coat allows him to swim for much longer periods. He doesn't tire nearly as quickly ...

The coat has an athletic fit and Fortis doesn't at all mind wearing it. Another benefit I didn't take into consideration was how much more visible he is to boaters. This past weekend was the 4th of July and lots of boats were on the water. I felt much more at ease knowing he could be seen.”

— [Fortisdad](#)



Rear Leg Cane Corso Amputee Fortis Swims Safely with [Big Eddy Float Coat from Ruff Wear](#)

Recommended Reading

 [Swim Your Tripawd to Better Health](#)
K9 CARE Inc. Offers Swim Therapy Suggestions for Tripawds

 [Every Doggy Into the Pool](#)
USA Today Article Discusses Swim Fitness and Fun

 [Swimming a front leg amputee](#)
Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic

 [Going back to swim with 3 turbo-jet engines](#)
Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic

 [Float Coat Demonstration Video](#)
Tripawds Reviews the Ruff Wear Portage and Big Eddy

 [Tripawd Dogs Swimming](#)
Tripawds Three Legged Dogs Swimming YouTube Playlist



[Fortis Swims](#)



[Swim Therapy for Jake](#)

Dog Leggs Elbow Protectors

If your dog is prone to the patchy rough areas on doggie elbows otherwise known as hygromas, you may find that once she becomes a Tripawd, the hygromas can worsen.

In Titan's post about a [hygroma on a Mastiff](#) Dr. Wiltzius describes hygromas as...

“...a fluid pocket that builds up on the elbow of large/giant breeds. This is not that common in puppies, but it can occur in any age dog. The cause is inadequate padding/bedding material so it is essentially a pressure sore. It could also be due to a bite wound to the joint.

Either way the treatment is drainage, bandaging, and antibiotics. You want to try to avoid surgical removal because the elbow does not heal well.”

East Tennessee Gayle's Mom Charon recently created a custom [homemade elbow pad](#) which helped heal the hygroma [Gayle](#) got after amputation.

You can also order a [Dog Leggs Vest](#), which is a custom elbow protector that can [help hygromas heal](#) without having to drain them. The Dog Leggs company even makes a special one for front leg amputees.

Dog Leggs says...

“In almost all cases, draining the hygroma was not necessary. DogLeggs is often all that is need to cure this frustrating condition!

Manually removing fluid from a hygroma at the elbow with a Penrose drain or using a syringe and large bore needle was the technique most often taught in veterinary schools in past decades. However the latest, safest and most effective technique is to just have the patient wear a pair of Dog Leggs.”



[Gayle's Homemade Elbow Protector](#)

Therapy Beds

During the first few weeks after surgery, your Tripawd's incision will probably leak. Save yourself from excessive laundry, by keeping your Tripawd's bed covered with old towels or blankets that can be quickly swapped out and easily washed.

Many pawrents wonder if their Tripawd will need a special orthopedic bed to lay on after surgery. We think that a firm mattress is the best kind of bed your dog can have, and anything else with additional features is beneficial, but not always necessary.

When I got sick, my pawrents purchased a special orthopedic bed with a memory foam mattress, thinking I would love the comfortable bedding. Much to their surprise, I was afraid of the “whoosh” noise the bed made whenever I laid down on it, and refused to use it! Finally my pawrents got smart and went to a craft store to purchase 3” foam and covered it, much like [the bed that Tripawd Lalla's Mom](#) made for her. It was my favorite bed ever!

Lalla's instinct was right; the best kind of bed is a firm (non-lumpy) mattress that's easy for your Tripawd to walk on, and turn herself around when trying to get comfortable. Your Tripawd should easily be able to stand up on the bed without struggling.

i Overheated, tired dogs love cool surfaces to lay on. Cool surfaces feel good on achy bones, and they help with post-amputation pain management relief too. [Using ice](#) can reduce swelling and inflammation, and a [cooling dog bed](#) can aid in recovery.

A number of therapy beds have been created to meet this need. And while they're not critical for a Tripawd to have a good life, they sure can make life just a little bit more comfortable, especially dogs with osteoarthritis and degenerative joint disease.

The Cool Bed: Restful Sleep for Post-Surgery Tripawds

The Cool Bed III is a great post-surgery aid for Tripawds. It works like a water bed. Once you fill it with water, the specially designed inner foam and water cells will evenly distribute wave-free, soothing coolness that's at least 20 degrees cooler than the ambient air temperature.

The Cool Bed III requires no electricity to operate, and is suitable for indoor and outdoor use. You can even purchase fitted, washable sheets that can come in handy when your Tripawd is recovering from surgery.

Hot n' Cold ThermaMat

The dual purpose [Hot n' Cold ThermaMat Orthopedic Dog Mat](#) puts relief where it counts. This temperature-controlled orthopedic dog mat can be used alone or inside the cover of a favorite bed.

It provides a half hour of heat after warming it in the microwave for just a few minutes. Or cool it fully in the freezer to provide additional comfort when needed.

Ruff Wear Flophouse Foam Pad

The [Flophouse Foam Pad](#) from Ruff Wear is a firm, low profile, portable and completely washable dog bed, ideal for dogs recovering from amputation surgery.

The Perfect Bed for Your Tripawd Dog

"There's no animal on this planet who loves sleeping in as much as a dog. Although most of them think otherwise, most dogs do not need a human bed; they need a firm, comfortable no-frills / no-bling pad, which to our benefit should be easy to keep clean, i.e.: can be thrown into the washing machine.

But when you live with a Tripawd, you do have to make special orthopedic considerations, but those don't have to break your bank account.

Before amputation, Lalla slept in a huge plastic bassinet which was lined with 4 human size pillows. It became obvious after her surgery that I had to find a substitute as her shoulder was straining against the bassinet. We went through a milieu of pad beds but they were either too lumpy or too big for the washing machine.

So after searching hi and low, I found a folding guest bed with a perfect foam mattress; 1.5" thick, 6.5' long, with a removable swanky black and white striped cover. Out came the scissors and Lalla got an instant bed.

Lalla really loves her new bed, and we've already washed the cover a few times. It's firm, flat and has plenty of extra stretch space – ideal for a Tripawd. I bet most of you have one of those folding beds stored somewhere: all it takes is a pair of scissors to make a comfortable and "rabbit chase dreams" bed for your own Tripawd." — *Lalla's Mom*



[Cool Bed III](#)



[Hot n' Cold ThermaMat Orthopedic Dog Mat](#)

The Flophouse is a low-profile dog bed with a crush-proof foam mattress. It's perfect for new Tripawds with leaky seromas, and for recovered dogs who have just bathed or swam (yes, three legged dogs can swim!).

The durable outer cover is breathable and quick-dry, and actually has side drains that allow moisture to run out. Just run a hose over it to clean it, and watch how quickly it dries. The base foam layer inside is waterproof, and provides a moisture barrier on top and bottom of the bed. For additional cushioning at home, a thick piece of foam can be used under the Flophouse pad providing maximum comfort.

In a Tripawds live "Ask a Vet" chat, [Dr. Jessica Waldman advised](#) Kathy about orthopedic beds...

«Kathy» *Duncan (145-lb. St. Bernard) will be having his surgery soon. Should I buy him a special bed? He usually sleeps on the floor*

«Dr.Waldman» *Hi Kathy. In Chinese Medicine, we (and pets) run either hot or cool so if he prefers a cooler spot (floor) he will continue to do so. There are some [cooling beds](#) that have gels that some pets that are "hot" prefer*

«Kathy» *Not so much the LL Bean beds then, right?*

«admin» *there are some great therapeutic and [thermoregulating dog beds](#) in the [gear blog](#).*

«admin» *we're not vets but we believe "bean bag" beds that bunch up easily can trip new tripawds.*

«admin» *especially as they get up a lot trying to get comfortable.*

«Dr.Waldman» *Firmer beds are better. Something else to consider is that if your pet isn't able to flip from side to side post-op (like maybe your St Bernard, beds with an egg crate mattress prevent bed sores*



Wyatt on His [Flophouse Foam Pad](#)



[Flophouse Dog Bed Demo Video](#)

Car Ramps

i Tripawd or not, no dog should ever be allowed to jump in and out of a vehicle.

Jumping seems so harmless at the time, and dogs really do enjoy it, but in reality, every time your dog jumps up and down from the vehicle, he is exerting unnecessary stress on his joints that will lead to arthritis in later years. Although dogs have been jumping in and out of cars and trucks forever, the damage this activity can do is a recent discovery, thanks to the growing field of canine rehabilitation therapy.



We have always found the [Ruff Wear Harness](#) to be a huge help when it comes to loading up a Tripawd, but for people with giant breed dogs or those who aren't able to hoist their dog up into a high-clearance vehicle, you may find a dog ramp or fold-out stairs to be more useful.

Unfortunately, most of us never gave much thought to car ramps before our dog needed an amputation. Many of us suddenly find ourselves in the frantic situation of attempting to teach our Tripawd how to use a ramp after coming home from the hospital. While this isn't the ideal scenario, with patience and lots of treats, your Tripawd **can** learn how to use a ramp. (See "Recommended Reading" on next page.)

Thankfully, the days of heavy, bulky ramps are long gone. Today pawrents have the option of lightweight ramps and collapsible stairs that weigh much less than their predecessors but offer the same amount of support.

Ramp Versus Steps

Veterinary professionals say that ramps are better for dogs with severe degenerative issues, because the dog can ascend gradually and slowly, instead of hopping up to take long, upward strides while getting into a vehicle. But if you are just trying to avoid excessive stress on your dog's joints, collapsible stairs may be the most convenient and manageable option. We have discovered two convenient, sturdy options for helping Tripawds into cars and trucks.

The OttoStep Safe Pet Step for SUVs and Trucks

If you have a truck or SUV, The [OttoStep Pet Step](#) is one of the safest and most convenient ways to help your Tripawd in and out of your vehicle. The OttoStep is made from lightweight, nylon glass-filled plastic that can easily hold over 200 pounds – yet weighs less than six pounds! It's small, portable and much easier to handle than most large pet ramps.

The OttoStep is small, portable and much easier to handle than most large pet ramps. It attaches to any standard hitch receiver for easy access to the rear of most SUVs and pickup trucks. Download this [OttoStep training guide](#) for help getting dogs to use this innovative product.



[OttoStep Truck/SUV
Pet Step](#)



[Pet Loader Folding
Car Steps](#)

Pet Loader Car Steps Help Tripawds Go For Rides

[Pet Loader Car Steps](#) are wider and more stable than a ramp, and feature an adjustable incline, with a lower angle of ascent/decant and greater traction than ramp. These steps are lightweight and fold down to 7-1/4" high.

Tripawds, elderly dogs, and handicapped pets will especially appreciate Pet Loader's adjustable incline. Most dogs will instinctively know how to use the Pet Loader steps as opposed to becoming familiar with using a new ramp.

With its accordion fold and built-in hand holds, Pet Loader is easy to pick up and transfer to another vehicle, or store. Weighing only 21 pounds, Pet Loader folds to just 22" long, 18" wide and an amazingly short 7.5" high, small enough to fit in the under-the-seat compartment of many vans.

Recommended Reading



[Ramp Training Tips for Tripawds](#)

Pet Ramp and Step Use Tips from the Tripawds Gear Blog



[The Canine Behavior Series](#)

Ramp Training Tips from VeterinaryPartner.com



[Car Ramp](#)

Tripawds Tips and Resources Discussion Forum Topic



[Magic's New Toys: Pet Door and PetLoader](#)

Tripawds Treatent and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic



[Maggie goes Bikejring](#)

Tripawd Maggie Rides in Her New Bike Cart



[SolvIt Half Pet Ramp](#) for Dogs up to 200 lbs

Dog Strollers & Wagons

Strollers and wagons are great for multi-dog households. A stroller or wagon may enable you to take all of your dogs on that long walk, and alleviate any concerns that your Tripawd won't be able to make it home.

Although a Tripawd can do just about anything a four legged dog can do, taking the kind of long, multi-mile walks that four leggers are conditioned to may be out of the question for most Tripawds, especially while recuperating from surgery. If your dog can get used to riding along, you can all continue enjoying long strolls outside.

Be aware that not all dogs adapt well to strollers and wagons, some hate them and will try to jump out. Training your dog to stay inside of a wheeled device is important, and much like training them how to use a ramp. Patience, treats and discipline will be needed to train some dogs. The same tips used to teach a dog how to use a ramp can be applied toward training them use a stroller.

Ramp Training Tips:

Veterinary Partner.com offers [some training tips](#) to get your dog used to ramps. These same principles can be applied to collapsible stairs:

Teach One Direction First – “Support the dog’s body ascending or descending the ramp. It works better to teach one direction first. Dogs experience more injuries from jumping down, so this is a good direction to start. After the dog has mastered that direction, teach the other direction. This is less stressful for the dog and probably also easier on the muscles as they get used to new exertion.” Expect to spend a minimum of a week on this stage, and it may take longer. Don’t let the dog bypass the ramp and make the jump. Use a leash . . . restrict access . . . You are trying to help your dog form a solid habit.

No Pulling, Be Gentle and Supportive – When guiding a dog up or down a ramp, don’t pull on the collar. It’s tempting to do this, but don’t. Either support the dog with your hands in front of the chest, or put the dog in a non-restrictive harness to use for support. You could really use three hands for this—two on the dog and one for the food! But you can make do with the two hands you have, plus perhaps support to the dog from your knees, tummy, elbows—whatever works that is gentle and supportive to the dog.

Bribery Works – One hand needs to keep a steady supply of little treats flowing to the dog’s mouth. Don’t tease with the food—give it, give it, give it, in a flowing pattern. Focus the dog’s attention on that food. Besides serving as an incentive, the food helps keep the dog from fretting about the ramp.”

The Solvit HoundAbout Pet Stroller for Big Dogs

Tripawds has seen many successful examples of Tripawds letting their pawrents do the work and going along for the ride. Xena, a Rottweiler from New York, is one:

Xena and Her Big Dog Stroller

“Xena has had surgery on both cruciates. In addition to that, she had a tumor that ruptured her spleen in 2007. She had to have her spleen removed. Shortly after that she had bloat which required emergency surgery. So to say she’s been “through the mill” is an understatement. The scariest thing by far was her being diagnosed with osteosarcoma and having to make the decision to amputate her leg. Now a year later, after the surgery and the chemotherapy, she is still with us. She stays as active as she can given her ailments and her age. We still take her for walks in the city, and she even has her own “carriage” to get in when she gets too tired.

I highly recommend the [Solvit HoundAbout Pet Stroller for Big Dogs](#) to anyone. We get tons of people asking about it when we walk through NYC. It is well built, folds down for transport or storage and the company’s customer service is very helpful.

Xena loves riding in it. As you can see, even at 94 pounds, she fits in it comfortably. It also allows us to go places with her that we normally could not. We took her right inside the mall with it. This “buggy” has made such a difference in our lives. It lets Xena still get out and enjoy life and it allows us to wander a little farther from our home than just a block.”



Rottweiler Tripawd Xena in her [Solvit HoundAbout Pet Stroller](#)

We think this dog stroller by SolvIt is fabulous. With its zippered enclosure, there is no risk of your dog hurting herself by jumping out, while the mesh provides plenty of fresh air and allows her to see the sights.

If you get a stroller for your Tripawd, just remember to introduce him to it slowly. There are lots of ways to get a dog used to being carted around on wheels, and much like crate training, the stroller can become a comfortable place of refuge for your Tripawd.

We review the Solvit HoundAbout and other [pet strollers of various sizes](#) in the Tripawds Gear blog.

Wagons

Tripawd Shelby, on the other hand, loves her little red wagon. Here's how her pawrents helped her learn to enjoy the ride in a customized Radio Flyer. A forum post Shelby's Dad wrote about her experience with her shiny red wagon, Shelby says...

“Howdy, Shelby took her first ride in her Radio Wagon!

After we received the wagon, I took the “red part” and put it on the living room floor and put all her toys in it. For the first couple of days she would hop up to it, look, sniff and go away in search of a toy. Then we got some mesh nonskid type stuff, cut to fit on the bottom of the wagon, put the wheels on and put her toys back in. After a few days she would hop up, grab a toy and go on her way.

Thursday afternoon I lifted her into the wagon and she laid down! Lots of praise and treats, so I started slowly moving the wagon back and forth about a foot at a time. Friday afternoon I put the handle on wagon and helped Shelby in. She stayed put while we made a small circle in the living room.

We'll keep it nice and slow and work on getting her comfortable enough to take a ride outside.

It took awhile but I think we're on the right track!”



Shelby in Her Wagon

Whether you choose a wagon or stroller, always ensure that the device has something to restrain your dog while she's sitting inside. This will prevent your dog from jumping out while it's in motion.

i Never leave your dog unattended in a stroller or wagon.

While a comfy bed inside might seem nice, it could decrease the depth of the cart and create an unbalanced ride for your dog. A firm, low profile bed like [Ruff Wear's Flophouse Foam Pad](#) might be a better choice, if it fits the stroller you choose.

Recommended Reading

 [Strollers Help Dogs Large and Small Get Out](#)
Tripawds Gear Blog Large and Small Dog Stroller Review

 [Wagon Suggestions?](#)
Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic

 [Helping Shelby Get Around](#)
Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic

Wheelchairs

Can anyone guess what the most common fear among Tripawd pawrents is? Most pawrents fear that their Tripawd will lose the use of another limb.

What if a rear-leg amputee grows old, and hip dysplasia takes its toll? Or a front-leg Tripawd takes a bad fall and severely injures the remaining leg?

What would you do if your Tripawd permanently lost the use of another leg? Although we are unaware of any such instance, it never hurts to be prepared, just in case.

That's why we talked to the good people at [Doggon Wheels](#). Since 1994, Doggon Wheels has been one of the world's top creators of mobility aids for physically challenged animals.

We asked Doggon co-founder Lori a few [questions about how Tripawds can benefit from wheelchairs](#), and here's what she had to say...



Doggon Wheels Front Leg Cart

TRIPAWDS: *Can wheelchairs work with Tripawd dogs?*

DOGGON WHEELS: *"Yes- we do make wheelchairs for amputees. They are most commonly used by older amputee's who are starting to have difficulties compensating for the missing limb (front or rear), or for pets with birth defects. We also make wheelchairs for pets with double amputations.*

Generally they do really well with using wheels and appreciate being able to go for longer walks or on more varied/difficult terrain."

TRI: *The biggest fear some Tripawd pawrents have is for their dog to lose function of their remaining rear or front leg. We know of one Tripawd who needs a hip replacement, yet he is also a rear-leg amputee. Would a wheelchair help?*

DW: *"This is legitimate concern and why we recommend that you take into consideration putting the remaining rear leg up in the stirrup during periods of intense exercise. Generally the dogs using amputee wheelchairs are doing so because the other limb is overly stressed or arthritic. Putting the remaining limb into a suspended position allows it to rest during the most stressful periods of exercise.*

Owners who do this find that their dogs are able to get around easier on their own the rest of the time, when not in wheels. A wheelchair for the pet above would be useful for both long term use to avoid stressing the remaining limb post surgery, or if the humans opt not have his hip replaced."

TRI: *How do you measure a Tripawd for a wheelchair?*

DW: *The measurements are the same for all of our chairs, except for a Tripawd we need to know:*

- *Is s/he a left or right amputee?*
- *Does the dog have any part of her leg remaining? Is the amputation site partial or flush? Most amputations are flush, however if there is enough leg remaining that you can measure the circumference around it, a different support might be needed, other than our amputee support.*

Not every pawdy thinks that every Tripawd should use a wheel chair, so it's impawtant to get an opinion from a board-certified canine rehabilitation therapist before shopping for one. Tripawd's favorite veterinarian, Dr. Pam Wiltzius, says that carts shouldn't be used except as a last resort:

“I do not think that a cart is a good idea, and should not be necessary. Most dogs adapt quite well but you have to give them time to use and develop some other muscles. Carts are best for animals that are permanently injured (spinal cord disease) or impaired in both front or back legs.”

Recommended Reading



[Discouraged at Lack of Products Available for Tripawds](#)

Tripawd Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic



[Front Wheel Cart, Yes or No?](#)

Tripawd Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic



[Tripawds Video Interview with California Animal Rehab](#)

Dr. Amy Kramer Discusses Use of Carts for Tripawds, and Much More



[Tripawds CARE Video Interview Part 2](#)

Chapter 12: Rehabilitation and Continuing Care

Question: *Three Legged Max asks: [How Do You Tire Out a Three Legged Dog?](#)*

Answer: *Step 1. Go for a walk. Step 2. There is no Step 2. You're done.*

Walking Your Tripawd After Surgery

As your Tripawd recovers from amputation surgery, you're probably counting down the days to when she can get out and go for walks again. But before you head out the door with your new three legged dog, here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- It's easier for Tripawds to hop along at a quicker pace than to walk slowly.
- Allow plenty of time for rest and recuperation.
- Walks that used to take 15 minutes can now take 30.
- Your dog will try to go farther than she should. It's up to you to make sure she doesn't overdo it.
- Take shorter more frequent walks. Start with just a quarter the distance of your regular walk.
- Don't push it. Watch for signs of exertion and stop to rest as needed.
- Remember: dogs carry 60% of their weight on the front legs. This is especially important to consider when exercising front-legged Tripawds.
- Always carry plenty of water with you, and [something convenient to drink from](#).



Jerry Drinks from [Water Rover](#) Sport Bottle for Dogs

Although Tripawds can do just about anything a quadruped dog can do, please remember that they are working harder than their four legged friends, and will need extra time to rest during exercise, and more water.

Amputee dogs can go on walks, short hikes, and play at the dog park, but they will overdo it, and potentially injure themselves, if you don't monitor their activity closely.

Allowances will need to be made. Those four mile hikes you used to take are probably going to be a thing of the past. And that half mile walk to the beach might be too far at first. Just be sure to follow your dog's lead and stop when she needs to rest.

But please, don't mourn what you've lost, because your dog sure won't. He's just hoppy to be alive! Rejoice in the fact that your dog is still around. Find exciting new things to do together that don't involve a lot of walking or exertion. Endurance workouts are not what you want for your Tripawd; the best thing you can do for his health is to find fun activities will keep his legs strong and not put undue stress on his joints. Try new strengthening exercises and balance games; you'll be surprised how quickly mental workouts will tire out your energetic Tripawd.

Sure, it's a lifestyle change for both of you, but don't you think this is a small price to pay for giving your best friend a pain-free life?

Recommended Reading

 [Walking with a Three Legged Dog](#)
Helpful Tripawd Tips from HubPages.com

 [Road Trips with Three Leggers](#)
Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Topic

 [Three Legged Fun on the Buja Board](#)
Dr. Laura Hady Demonstrates Core Exercises Using Homemade Buja Board

 [Swim Your Tripawd to Better Health](#)
Canine Swim Therapy Can Help With Amputation Surgery Recovery

 [How to Build a Homemade Buja Board](#)
Download Homemade Buja Board Plans



[Homemade Buja Board Demonstration](#)



[Water Rover Dog Sport Bottle Review](#)



[Hydrotherapy Rehab Benefits](#) for Tripawd Rottweiler Max

Tips for Keeping Your Tripawd Fit

During [this Tripawds "Ask A Vet" chat](#), Canine rehabilitation expert, Dr. Jessica Waldman of [California Animal Rehabilitation Center](#) provided the following advice for keeping three legged dogs fit:

«hugapitbull» My question relates to establishing how much activity is too much for a senior tripawd, especially one who has never been extremely active.

«Dr.Waldman» Tripawds (and all dogs) shouldn't have to take breaks on walks or walk behind you on a walk. Walks should be limited to the length of time that the pet can be energetic and walk without rest. Uncontrolled play and running, jumping, etc should be limited. Less is more for endurance activities!

«admin» so, shorter, more frequent walks?

«Dr.Waldman» Much shorter, more frequent walks, yes

«jerry» So if a dog sits down during walks, is that a bad sign?

«Dr.Waldman» Yes, if the dog sits on the walk, the walk is too long! Endurance is not rehab, strengthening exercises are!

«oniongrrrr!» is there anything I can do to help strengthen that leg?

«Dr.Waldman» Lots. Check [the videos](#), flexibility: shoulder and hip extension, strengthening: [unstable surface work](#), weight shifts, treats to all directions, sit to stands in reps on good flooring, obstacle course, and limit ballistic movements and longer endurance exercises

«Dr.Waldman» Stairs are fine for function but too much for exercises. Sometimes we use aerobics steps with carpet on top to do weight shifting exercises with legs elevated to work on legs on the ground more. also, can do exercises on a ramp.

Weight Management

Did you know that one pound of fat on a dog is the equivalent of five pounds of fat on a human?

Keeping your dog's weight just ten pawcent less than it is now will make a huge difference in his mobility. Dr. Waldman says that in many studies, a reduction in body weight will reduce clinical signs of arthritis by thirty pawcent.

Muscle soreness and joint stress can be kept to a minimum by watching your Tripawd's weight. Keeping Tripawds fit and trim is imperative for maximizing their quality of life.

Trouble is one Tripawd whose vet didn't think she was a good candidate for amputation. Her mom, Shanna says...

“Between the day she was operated on and the last chemo ... she lost 14 pounds. She has gained enough back (19 months later) that we have her on a reducing diet. They will do much better if they are on the thin side. It takes the extra stress and strain off the three remaining legs.

This was our only chance at giving Trouble any quality of life, so we took the chance knowing the weight was against her. For us, it worked out.”

Brandy is an example of another Tripawd who successfully lost weight...

“Don't worry too much about the weight before amputation. Like everyone stated above, there will be a bit of weight loss after the surgery and recovery. Our Rotti Brandy weighed in at 121 lbs before amputation. She was a bit of a Chunk!

Unfortunately they removed one of her front legs which carries most of her weight. She also has a huge barrel chest and we were not sure how she would balance. The vet told us we really had to get her down in weight after the amputation so she would have an easier time with 3 legs. Brandy just went in today for her 2nd round of Chemo and her weight came in at 96.4 lbs!! Her amputation was May 18th. She has 6 more pounds to lose to hit her “Cancer Fighting Weight” of 90 lbs!”



Trouble Lost Weight With Her [Canine Reducing Diet](#).

Recommended Reading



[Need Advice About Amputation for Overweight Dog](#)

Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic



[Meet Three Legged English Mastiff Tazzie](#)

Dr. Pam Wiltzius Discusses Importance of Weight Management



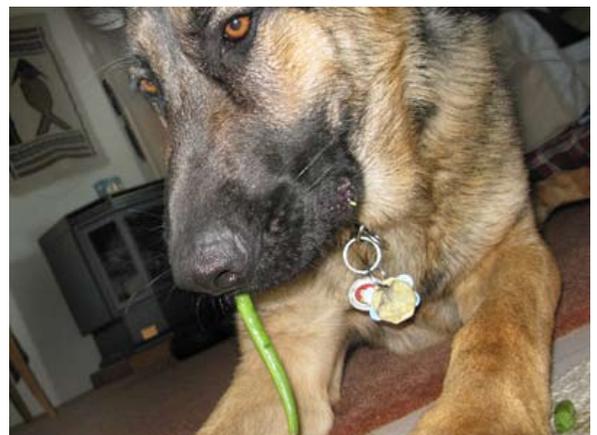
[Association for Pet Obesity Prevention](#)

Tips and Tools for Helping Pets Lose Weight



[High Protien Low Fat Dog Food Recipe](#)

Excerpt from “The Canine Ancestral Diet”



Wyatt Enjoys Low Fat Green Bean Treat

So whether your dog is a big-boned [Giant Breed](#), or a food happy Lab, if you're committed to getting your dog in top shape before surgery day, an overweight dog can make a good Tripawd. Since losing weight through exercise isn't an option for a dog needing amputation, you can approach weight loss by:

Weight Loss Tips for Tripawds:

- Talk to your vet. Find out the ideal weight for your dog's breed and size.
- The best weight loss plan is one that provides approximately 75%-80% of the calories your pet would require at that [ideal weight](#).
- Find out the right amount of food your dog needs to eat, and stick to it. Reducing the amount of food by 20 percent can show results in as few as two weeks.
- Don't give up if you get puppy eyes or begging. Your dog is fighting for his health; make sure he has a good start by staying slim.

Don't make changes all at once. Proper nutrition for dogs is a relatively new aspect of pet [pawrenthood](#). But, after seeing the rise in diseases like bone cancer, we are finally applying the old adage, "You Are What You Eat" to our canine friends.

The shock of learning that your dog's health is severely compromised may tempt you to immediately switch foods. But before you do, take a step back. There is so much canine nutrition information available, it can be difficult to distinguish fact from fiction. A greater risk of switching diets right before or after surgery is that it is often difficult to discern between a poor appetite due to pre or post-op discomfort, or that your dog just doesn't like his new diet.

Before switching diets, we recommend talking to a [holistic nutritional expert](#) who will learn exactly what your dog needs (and wants) to stay healthy and/or fight cancer. Introduce any new foods slowly. Remember, your dog's appetite may be lagging because of pain, so if she won't eat, that doesn't mean she won't ever eat that kind of diet. Just take it slow and don't get frustrated. There will be plenty of time later on to play with new foods.

Above all remember; Please don't force sudden change. While time is always precious, it's absolutely priceless when you're battling cancer. The time you spend together should be about enjoying each other's company and cherishing every minute, appreciating the simple things, rather than coping with sudden distasteful changes.

Healthy Feeding Tips

Our dogs are as different from each other as people are, and one diet won't work for everyone. Not everyone has time to cook for their dogs, or feels comfortable feeding a "BARF" ([Bones and Biologically Appropriate Raw Foods](#)) diet, and many of our budgets are too tight to afford the highest rated premium kibble. But, there are things that all of us can do to improve our dog's health, whether or not they have cancer.



[Maggie](#) gets fed by syringe after losing her appetite.

Change **your** behavior to help your dog eat a healthy diet.

- Eliminate all but the healthiest snacks. No more flour-based treats; stick to celery, carrots and safe fruits (No Grapes or raisins!) for snacking on.
- Do not feed unhealthy table scraps and pre-processed foods like poultry skins and bacon. Many pawrents want to feed their dogs anything and everything, especially if they're fighting terminal cancer. We understand how much you want to feed them their favorite foods when their time could be so limited. So we suggest following Spirit Cherry's advice to use a favorite food like ice cream as acknowledgment of a special celebration or milestone, while making sure that it's not overused as a snack.
- Dieting dogs will try to steal food from their siblings. Make sure food for your other dogs doesn't get consumed by your Tripawd.
- Keep garbage and bowls of food out of your dog's reach and visual space. He may try to eat whatever is easiest if he is being denied his usual large portions of food.
- Make your dog work for his food. Teach him to always come and sit before placing the food bowl on the floor and allowing him to eat. With [Wyatt](#), we demand that he makes eye contact with us (very difficult to do for a dog with his abusive history) before giving him permission to eat.
- Stopping all treats that aren't "diet" snacks of seven calories or less will have a tremendous impact.

Recommended Reading



[Feeding, Dieting and Nutrition Tips](#)

Dog Health Tips from Paw Rescue



[Natura/EVO/California Naturals sold](#)

Tripawds Members Discuss Healthy Dog Food Alternatives

Upgrade Your Dog's Menu

As we saw from the 2007 pet food scare, commercial pet food manufacturers do not always have your dog's best interest in mind. Claims of "balanced" and "real meat" go unchecked by the government, and commercial pet food manufacturers generally have loose restrictions when it comes to what goes into their bags of kibble.

In the interest of your dog's health, and subsequent lower veterinarian bills, if you intend to continue on a kibble-only diet, we urge you to check out newer, [healthier premium foods](#) that are now on the market.

Kibble Feeding Tips

Kibble is a dry food, and dogs who are on kibble-only diets tend to crave moisture in their meals. If your dog drinks copious amounts of water after eating, this is one indication that she needs more moist foods in her diet. To make it soft, add water and lightly steamed veggies to your dog's food.

Remember that kibble can be used for training and as a treat. Stick with the kibble he likes and crunchy snacks like green beans, carrots, celery and even rice cakes.

Feed Real Foods

Did you know that dogs lived and thrived for millennia by living off all natural foods instead of kibble? We wrote about [what's really in your dog's food](#) in the [Tripawds News](#) blog. The commercial pet food industry is a relatively new one, created as a way for beef and poultry processors to profitably use up waste products. Since the 1950s, they've found lots of ways to disguise preservatives, chicken beaks and sawdust as "food" for your fur kid.

We are firm believers in the benefits of the BARF diet, which is feeding a diet based on bones and raw food. [I ate this way throughout my cancer therapy](#), and didn't have a problem. But, this diet may not be right for all dogs. Many oncologists and [vets don't believe](#) that dogs battling cancer should be given the BARF diet because a compromised immune system might get easily sickened by the tiniest bit of bacteria on raw meat, that an otherwise healthy dog might not have problems with.

Recommended Reading

 [What's Really in Your Pet's Food and Why You Need to Know](#)

Startling Information from the Tripawds News Blog

 [Home Cooking is Good for My Belly](#)

Wyatt Ray Dawg's Home Cooked Diet

 [Healthy Pet Diet eBook](#)

Includes 245 Homemade Dog Food Recipes

 [Healthy Cooking the Three Dog Way](#)

Homemade Dog food Recipe eBook from Three Dog Bakery

 [Natural Pet Health Books by Dr. Pitcairn](#)

Tripawds Canine Diet Book Recommendations



[Wyatt's Home Cooked Dog Food](#)

Talk to Your Vet About Diet

Most oncologists and vets are skeptical about home cooking and will usually tell you not jump into any new diets and to avoid RAW diets altogether. The lack of hard scientific evidence about the benefits of home cooking and raw feeding tends to make most veterinary professionals shy away from recommending it.

However, keep in mind that most veterinarians spend few hours studying nutrition counseling. Of the 27 accredited veterinary schools in the U.S., only ten require students to take a single unit of nutrition studies and five teach no nutrition courses at all. Only one school offers nutrition instruction throughout veterinary education.*

If you aren't satisfied with the nutrition advice your vet gives, we recommend talking with a veterinary nutrition expert about the best diet for your Tripawd. You may want to seek nutrition counseling with a [holistic veterinarian](#) or a veterinarian who is board [certified in Veterinary Nutrition](#).

*Referenced from [Feed Your Pet Right](#).

About RAW or “BARF” Diets

(Biologically Appropriate Raw Food)

Some pawrents swear that feeding their dog raw meats and bones has a lot to do with their longevity and health, but the evidence is still anecdotal. It's up to each pawrent to decide if this type of diet is appropriate for their dog.

Some pups, like Tripawd Spokesdawg Wyatt Ray, [have a sensitive belly](#) and he can't get a lot of raw meat. We try to give him as many raw bones as he will tolerate to clean his teeth, but he gets more cooked, homemade stews than raw bones, along with his premium kibble.

The following excerpt from a veterinary paper may help ease the fears about raw feeding:

“...However, the majority of research suggests that dogs (and cats) are relatively resistant to bacterial pathogens found on commercially available raw meat sources, with shedding of consumed bacteria occurring briefly or not at all, and raw bones are much more digestible than cooked bones.

It should be remembered, however, that animals or their owners with compromised health or immature immune systems may be more susceptible to illness caused by bacteria. Likewise, raw bones are not without some risk; several cases of fecal impaction and intestinal accidents such as bowel perforation have been reported.

Cooked bones must NEVER be fed, since they are brittle and prone to splintering, that can cause both obstructions and perforations of the intestinal tract.”

— Based on material written by Steve Marsden, DVM ND MSOM Lac DiplCH AHG, Shawn Messonnier, DVM and Cheryl Yuill, DVM, Msc, CVH. Copyright 2004, Lifelearn Inc.

Cancer Diet Appropriate Vegetables

If your dog is fighting cancer avoid carbohydrates (unless your pet has trouble gaining weight). Carbs convert to sugar and sugar feeds cancer cells. Common carbs include:

- peas
- carrots
- wheat
- corn
- white rice
- potatoes

Grate or steam vegetables to make them digestible. Good veggies to use include:

- apples
- lettuce
- broccoli
- beans
- yams
- squash
- parsnips
- sui choi
- spinach
- kale
- parsley
- garlic

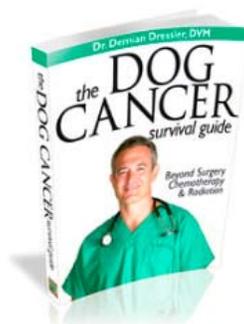
Always Avoid:

- onions
- avacado
- grapes

To stretch your food budget, [Dog Cancer Vet Dr. Demian Dressler](#) says that brown rice and oatmeal are suitable to use as filler in home cooking for dogs with cancer.

“In general, I say to avoid carbohydrates and sugars. Whole grains can be given, especially if you are concerned about cost and want to give a tasty bulk to an otherwise all meat and vegetable meal. Try well-cooked, softened brown rice. The bran in the rice contains polysaccharides that have some evidence for cancer-fighting ability. Oatmeal is another good option for a wholesome grain.”

— From Dr. Dressler’s [Dog Cancer Survival Guide](#)



[Dog Cancer Survival Guide](#)
eBook Review

If you’ve been thinking about changing your Tripawd’s diet completely, or just occasionally cooking home-made food for him, here are a few tips, recipes and considerations we learned from our friends, at the [Santa Fe Veterinary Cancer Care clinic](#), who are also advocates for getting back to basics with dogs’ diets.

Nutritional Alternatives for Cancer Patients

By Susan G. Wynn, DVM, CVA

Generally, there are no standard diet guidelines for most canine cancer patients. Information is constantly evolving, but overall, based on accumulated research, it is believed that a low carbohydrate, moderate fat and protein diet will help improve a dog’s overall health, and increase its survival time after diagnosis.

A balanced meal might look like this:

- 50 percent fish or poultry (organic preferred but not necessary)
- 50 percent mixed frozen or fresh vegetables
- Olive oil as a source of fat calories (about 1 tsp per 20 pounds of body weight)
- A HUMAN daily vitamin-mineral supplement (one dose for animals over 20 pounds, 1/2 dose for animals under 20 pounds)
- A calcium source – about 250 mg per 15 pounds of body weight

Some recipe additions that have been found to display cancer preventative activity include:

- Garlic (fresh, about 1 clove per 40 pounds of body weight)
- Turmeric (about 1 tsp. Per 50 pounds of body weight)



Wyatt Enjoy’s [Spot’s Stew](#)

Home Cooking Basics

Until the last few years, most of us never thought twice about feeding our fur kids kibble from a bag. But then the pet food scares happened in 2006 and suddenly we started paying attention to what went into our pup's bowls. Every day, more people are taking the time to prepare a home made meal for their dog.

For a healthier Tripawd, try giving your dog as close to a homemade diet as pawsible. Even if you can't give home cooking all the time (few people can), anytime you are able to give your dog a whole, unprocessed human-grade food you are helping to improve her health. Home cooked diets are a little more work, but we like to think of it like this; either pay now with a healthier diet, or pay later in veterinary bills for conditions such as food-related allergies (over-exposure to feeding the same kibble day in and day out is one way to become allergic to certain foods). Preservatives in commercial pet food can also put your dog's health at risk.

 You love your Tripawd. Why would you give her anything less healthy than what you would eat?

When preparing homemade dog food, keep in mind:

- The most balanced diet should provide the right amount of calories for his/her activity level. Here is a [raw food diet calculator](#) to help you figure out this amount.
- It should have the right amount of vitamins and minerals.
- Ensure it has the right amounts of proteins and fats.
- Keep the recipes simple; if it's too complicated, you won't stick to it.
- Vary the type of meat and vegetables used, to guard against food sensitivities or nutritional deficiencies arising from always using the same ingredients.
- Lightly cooked meats have a higher nutrient content than fully cooked meats.
- Try to feed organ meats at least a few days a week.
- Avoid carbohydrates and starches, unless your pet has trouble gaining weight. Carbs include: peas; wheat; corn; grains; potatoes. This is especially important for dogs with cancer.
- Grate or steam vegetables to make them digestible. Good veggies to use include are: apples; lettuce; broccoli; beans; yams; carrots; squash; parsnips; sui choi; spinach; kale; parsley; garlic.
- Risky foods to avoid are: onions, raisins, grapes, avocado, chocolate. Some people say no garlic either. Captain Jack's mom discusses this further in her [healthy dog treat recipe for Captain Jack](#).
- Pre-prepared frozen meat and vegetable diets, sold to be fed raw, can be instead lightly stir-fried and fed as a home-cooked diet. Do not cook raw food diets that contain bone fragments.
- A raw, quartered beef knuckle bone or other rounded bone can be given daily to help maintain dental health.
- Never feed poultry or pork bones, and never feed cooked bones!
- Dogs who have always eaten a commercial kibble diet may not find real foods appealing at first. It's like trying to get kids to eat granola after eating Captain Crunch all their lives. Commercial foods have sweeteners to get dogs to eat them; it will take time for your dog to adjust to the unsweetened but healthy flavors of real food.

To read about what other pawrents are feeding their dogs, please visit the Tripawds [Eating Healthy discussion forum](#), and review the following resources:

Recommended Reading

-  [Canine Reducing Diet](#)
Trouble's Dog Diet Details
-  [Alternative Diets, Assessing Home Cooked Raw Diets](#)
Veterinary Diet Information from the University of California at Davis
-  [A Fresh Look at Optimum Diet for Animals](#)
Dog Diet Tips from Shirley's Wellness Cafe
-  [Pat McKay's Raw Food Diet Recipe](#)
Healthy homemade Dog Food from animalhomeopathy.net
-  [BARF: Bones and Raw Food for Dogs](#)
The Search for a Better Canine Diet Continues
-  [Wyatt Ray Dawg's Diet Information](#)
Posts from Wyatt's Blog about his Diet
-  [High Protein Diet and Kidney Problems](#)
Tripawds Ask A Vet Discussion Forum Topic
-  [How to Eat Like Our Canine Ancestors](#)
Unlocking the Canine Ancestral Diet by Canine Nutritionist Steve Brown

Cancer Specific Diet Information

-  [Jerry's Diet While Fighting Osteosarcoma](#)
Chosen Canine Cancer Diet and Supplements Regimen for Jerry
-  [No Raw Diet During Chemotherapy](#)
Tripawds Treatment and Recovery Discussion Forum Topic
-  [Ideas to Improve Cancer Dog Diet](#)
Tripawds Eating Healthy Discussion Forum Topic
-  [Anatolian Shepherd Cemil Beats The Odds With Osteosarcoma](#)
Video interview and Canine Cancer Diet and Supplement Details
-  [Raw Diet Kept Gracie from Getting Cancer](#)
Healthy Raw Cancer Dog Diet includes Premium Bison Kibble
-  [Maggie Shares Agile Cow Dog Nutrition Plan](#)
Canine Cancer Diet and Supplements Treatment Plan
-  [Tripawds Nutrition Blog: Maxi Mutt's Healthy Cancer Diet](#)
Homemade Dog Food Recipe for Canine Cancer Survivor Max
-  [Natural Pet Health Books by Dr. Richard Pitcairn](#)
Holistic Dog Diet and Nutrition books by Richard H. Pitcairn, DVM
-  [Help Your Dog Fight Cancer](#)
Canine Cancer Care Guide from Veterinary Writer Laurie Kaplan
-  [Essential Holistic Veterinary Care Books](#)
The Nature of Animal Healing and other Books by Dr. Marty Goldstein

Basic Recipe for a Home Cooked Meal*

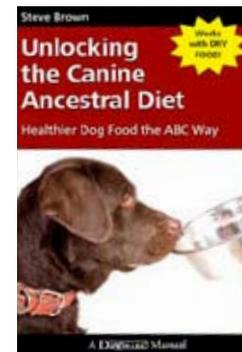
This will feed a 50 pound dog for about one day. Increase or decrease according to your dog's size and activity level.

- 10 ounces of meat (de-boned)
- 6 to 7 ounces of steamed grated vegetables (mix of root vegetables, leafy greens, zucchini, etc.)
- 1 to 1.5 tsp salt
- 750 mgs of bone meal (NOT the plant kind) or calcium citrate (available from drug or health food stores).
- Missing Link or other mineral supplement

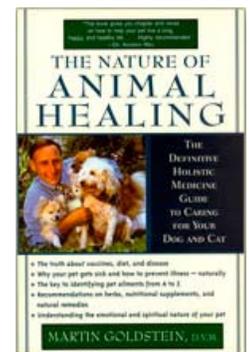
Cook and de-bone meat (or serve raw), along with a combination of steamed vegetables, salt, bone meal and supplement of choice.

Information courtesy of the [Veterinary Cancer Care center](#), Santa Fe, New Mexico

*Please keep in mind that we are not experts, and your dog's own nutritional needs will be different than others. Consult with your veterinarian or pet nutritionist with any concerns, or visit the [Tripawds Discussion Forums](#) for feedback from others.



[Healthier Dog Food the ABC Way](#)



[The Definitive Holistic Pet Medicine Guide](#)



[Canine Cancer Caretaker Guide](#)

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

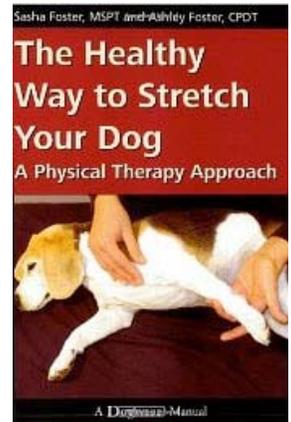


Drs. Kramer and Waldman of [California Animal Rehab](#)

A canine rehabilitation specialist can help your dog recover faster and teach you fun games to play that will strengthen your Tripawd without causing injury. Visit the worldwide [Canine Rehabilitation Institute](#) to find a trusted therapist near you.

i When exercising your Tripawd, specialists recommend:

- After exercising your dog, take note of his behavior. Your dog should end up with the same amount of energy he started with.
- If your dog appears sore after a long day playing with other dogs try [applying moist heat](#) to the area, before you [massage it](#). Heat the massage pad for ten minutes.
- If your Tripawd shows signs of being sore after play sessions, cut back the next play session to one tenth of the previous one. Slowly build back up to the longer sessions.
- Keep researching canine physical therapy to learn about different activities that are both fun and rehabilitative.



[Canine Massage and Physical Therapy Books](#)

Walking

Be sure to review the previous section about [Walking Your Tripawd](#) for more helpful recommendations, and remember to:

- Break up your long endurance walks into shorter sessions. (Dr. Waldman says that even Tripawds who are well-healed from surgery shouldn't be walked for more than 15 minutes at a time, two or three times daily.)
- Alternate walks with other standing exercises and core work for 10 to 15 minutes a day.



Jerry and Calpurnia Walking in Colorado

Core Strengthening

Tripawds benefit greatly from body exercises to strengthen core muscle groups:

- Build a homemade obstacle course with sticks or PVC poles, criss-crossed on the floor. For more mobile dogs you can build [cavaletti obstacle poles](#).
- Have your dog walk in deep sand, at the beach or the playground. Limit this activity to five minutes at a time. This helps build up core strength, which is critical for balance and stability.
- Slowly attempt to shift weight onto your dog's amputation side. He will resist while you do this; this is what you want.
- Get your dog to shift her weight back and forth while reaching for treats. Have her sit, stand, repeat.
- If your Tripawd is higher functioning, have them do "sit-to-stands" on an [unstable surface](#).
- Have your dog stand on a low but slightly unstable surface (such as a [buja board](#) or sofa pillows). Work on shifting their weight back and forth.



[Wyatt on the Buja Board](#)



[Maggie's Core Exercises](#)

Recommended Reading



[Three Legged Fun on the Buja Board](#)

Wyatt Demonstrates Homemade Buja Board Exercises



[Exercise Rehab for Tripawder Maggie](#)

Maggie Demonstrates Various Core Strengthening Exercises



[Exercises and Stretching for New Tripawds](#)

Rehab Advice from California Animal Rehab



[Benefits of Balance Pads and Discs](#)

Helpful Rehab Exercise Products from FitPaws



[Exercise and Rehab Tips for Tripawds](#)

Canine Physical Therapy Advice and Recommended Books



[Pilates for Pooches](#)

How To Teach Tripawds Strength and balance Moves



[The Healthy Way to Stretch Your Dog](#)

A Physical Therapy Approach (Dogwise Manual)



Jake Gets ready for a Swim in His [Ruff Wear Float Coat](#)

Swimming

To ensure the safety and comfort of your dog while in the pool, don't miss the previous section about [Life Jackets for Swimming Tripawds!](#)

Hydrotherapy Exercise Tips:

- Walking and standing in hip-height water is much better than swimming, according to Dr. Waldman. Swimming is OK for Tripawds, she says, but you should do a lot of shoulder and hip extensions to combat the stiffness that will happen as a result.
- Limit your dog's swimming lessons to five minutes each, then take a short break and repeat three times, once daily.
- A kiddie pool may be perfect for small dogs. Have your Tripawd practice "sit-to-stands" while assisting him. As he sits, put his good leg under his pelvis in a tuck. Do this five times early in the day, then repeat at the end of the day.

Advice from a Three Legged Agility Dog

Tripawd Maggie's Mom, Tracy, says that Maggie has seen many benefits of careful exercise:

“After a live “Ask A Vet” chat on Tripawds.com with Dr. Waldman this month, I've gotten Maggie back on track with her PT work. We'd been slacking off a bit with the better weather now and have just been taking walks. Dr. Waldman said that walking is NOT rehab and that Tripawds need to have a strong core....so along with some stuff I have gotten from video's I have by Dr. Chris Zink and Debbie Saunders, I also decided to buy two FitPaws balance cushions after the chat with Dr. Waldman.

Adding strengthening activity to our Tripawd's – or any dog's – exercise, has many benefits:

- Improved reaction and body control
- Increased trunk and core strength
- Stabilization of weak areas
- Improved balance and awareness of the body's position in space
- Increased range of motion of joints and lengthening of muscles

Here is Maggie on the [FitPaws balance cushions](#). I bought two to put side by side so I could get her entire body on the cushions. I have her do reps. of "sit-to-stand"; reach for treats to shoulders and hips; walk over cushion; front or rear paw(s) on cushion and reach for treats; and manually rock her front to back and side to side."

Maggie's Post-Amputation Exercise Tips

Maggie is an award winning agility dog and one of our most active and fit Tripawds. Her Mom provides the following exercise suggestions to maintain core strength and maximize mobility:

- Work on [FitPaws Pads](#) or a [Buja Board](#) – reach for treats to shoulders and hips and between front legs too. Sits/ downs/ stands. Walk on/ walk off pads or board.
- Two cones – do serpentine's around the two cones
- Cavaletti's – 5 roughly 4" high 'jumps' about her body length apart. Hops the full length of them not knocking them over.
- Perch work – her front feet on a short 'perch' of sorts (mine is an end of an old log about 3" high) and she pivots around it

These two things are what Maggie used to compete in or does compete in now and is helpful for her fitness:

- Rally obedience exercises – basically, exercises in heel – turns (180's, 270's, 360's), sits/ downs/ stands, weaving around cones in heel
- Agility exercises – just playing going thru hoops and a short tunnel – this is only because she was an agility dog for 8 years – she still LOVES it – so I play a little bit with her on the 'safe' obstacles
- There are both rally and a bit of [agility videos on her blog](#) as well. Not that these need to be done for PT work but the Rally could easily be done in NYC – it is a great fitness/ strength help for Maggie."



[Maggie Demonstrates FitPAWS Balance Disc](#)



[Maggie Demonstrates Cone Weaves](#)

Recommended Reading



[Exercise Rehab/Core Work for Tripawders](#)

Tripawds Hopping Around Discussion Forum Topic



[Help Dogs Exercise Core Body Muscles](#)

FitPaws Pet Balance Pads Product Review and Demonstration Video



[FitPAWS Pet Balance Disk Exercise Video](#)

Another Innovative Dog Fitness Product from FitPAWS

Don't be a Weekend Warrior

While Tripawds can be seen at the local dog park on Saturday mornings, it's important to be aware of "weekend warrior" syndrome. This occurs when a dog sits around all week, then suddenly plays hard all day Saturday when his pawrent has time to take him to the park. It's a phenomena not unlike that experienced by humans, too! Weekend warrior Tripawds end up sore and tired for days after.

Dr. Waldman refers to ongoing hard play – like the kind of fun we have at the dog park – as "explosive activity." Sudden hard play for prolonged periods of time can lead to physical damage and acceleration of degenerative diseases like arthritis.

If you go to dog parks, always keep a close eye on your Tripawd and don't let him participate in prolonged episodes of chasing and running. Do your best to force your Tripawd to take breaks, by leashing him up a few times during the visit and making him rest.



Weekend Warrior Wyatt

Recommended Reading



[A Discussion with Dr. Jessica Waldman from CARE](#)

Live Tripawds "Ask A Vet" Chat Transcript Highlights



[Why you and Fido need to play it safe while having fun in the sun](#)

"Weekend Warriors" Article from Tails, Inc.

Conclusion

Based on our own experiences and input from [Tripawds community](#) members, we believe this eBook covers all of the basics about amputation for dogs and how to decide if it's right for you. If you believe there is something we have left out, or anything we should address in more detail, please [let us know](#).

If you would like to share the details of your Tripawd hero's experience with the world, by all means, please do. The more information we can share, the more help we can offer those facing the same difficult decisions with their own dogs. Please consider starting a [Tripawds Blog](#) or visit the [Tripawds Discussion Forums](#) to share your story.

If you ever believe we aren't giving the whole picture, please call us on it. We are not vets, and we are learning just as much from the experience of living with Tripawds and hearing this community's stories as you are. Together, we can expand our knowledge and keep on showing the world that "It's better to hop on three legs than limp on four!"



Thank you for downloading this first Tripawds eBook about amputation for dogs! In the future, look for new books about living with your three legged hero.

Appendix

What is Tripawds?

Tripawds.com is a user-supported online community for canine amputees and their people maintained by Jim Nelson ([Admin](#)) and René Agredano ([Jerry](#)). The site offers [free blogs](#) for those facing a cancer diagnosis and/or amputation for their dog, as well as a place to share their experiences, treatment plans and results, and offer support to others.

Launched in 2007, the [Tripawds Discussion Forums](#) are a primary resource for researching the real world experiences of other Tripawds featuring more than 3,000 informative topics and 40,000 posts, as of this writing.

Tripawds offers the following features to assist those facing decisions about amputation for their dogs:

- [Jerry's Tripawds News Blog](#) – The primary news source for three legged dogs and their people
- [Tripawds Discussion Forums](#) – A support group for the discussion of canine cancer care, amputation, treatment, and recovery of three legged dogs
- [Tripawds Live Chat](#) – A 24/7 live chat room for registered Tripawds users
- [Health Tips](#) – A summary of health and diet advice, exercise and fitness tips for canine cancer survivors and other three-legged dogs
- [Resources](#) – Information and links to helpful organizations, support groups, discussion forums, eBooks, therapy products and research endeavors.
- [Gallery](#) – Galleries featuring photos of three legged dogs, giant breed canine amputees, treatment and recovery, and more.
- [Videos](#) – Playlists featuring movies of Tripawds loving life and informative video interviews with owners of three legged dogs, veterinarians, and oncologists
- [Blogs Directory](#) – A listing of all active, most recently updated Tripawds Blogs
- [Tripawds Store](#) – A collection of helpful products, books and instructional DVDs with links to Featured Tripawds Blogs for current product reviews and recommendations
- [And much more!](#)

We [started Jerry's blog](#) upon receiving his cancer diagnosis in November, 2006 to share his progress with family and friends. Since adding discussion forums, membership has grown to nearly 2,000 registered users. For complete details, read our post about [Jerry's story and how Tripawds came to be](#).

- i** **The Tripawds Mission Statement:** To maintain a community of support for those faced with amputation for their dogs, by providing resources and a platform for discussion.



Tripawds Founder
Jerry G. Dawg



Tripawds Featured Blogs

Tripawds hosts free three legged dog blogs for anyone who wishes to share their dog's story or document their chosen treatment plan. [Tripawds Supporter Blogs](#) with enhanced features are available for a nominal fee. The following Featured Blogs focus on compiling specific information and resources relative to the care and treatment of canine cancer survivors and other amputee dogs.

Tripawds Gear Shop

Know which products are best for three-legged dogs by checking out [Tripawds Gear product reviews](#) and [demonstration videos](#). Here you will find the popular [Ruff Wear harness](#), [Float Coat life jackets](#) and other assistive devices.



Tripawds Nutrition

Learn about the [best dog supplements](#) and [healthy pet diets](#) for Tripawds, with or without cancer. [Save on dog medications](#), healthy foods, and learn about [K9 Immunity](#), [Power Mushrooms](#), [Dasuquin](#), and other canine supplements.

Tripawds Gifts Blog

Show your [Tripawd Pride](#) and spread the word about the amazing abilities of three-legged dogs. Visit the [Tripawds Gifts Blog](#) to shop for inspirational Tripawd t-shirts, [gift cards](#), stickers, tote bags and more. Choose from a wide selection of [pet photo boxes and urns](#) on the Remembrance page, or name your price for a [Tripawds dog bandanna](#).



Tripawds Amazon Selections

Save money and time by checking out the latest [dog health supplies](#), [cancer care books](#), [fun dog music](#), interactive dog toys, and more. We scour the best of Amazon to save you time!

Tripawds Downloads

Download helpful e-books, get [professional canine cancer advice](#) and watch dog health videos. Learn [dog massage techniques](#), make healthy [homemade dog food recipes](#), listen to general dog health and cancer expert podcasts and more.





Wyatt Ray's Blawg

Follow the three legged adventures of Tripawds spokesperson [Wyatt Ray Dawg](#). See his latest videos and find out where he's [traveling the country](#) with his pack, spreading the word that its better to hop on three legs than to limp on four.

The KillBarney Blog

Catch [the KillBarney tour](#), see [where it has been](#), and learn all about [Jerry's love/hate relationship](#) with a certain small, purple, fuzzy dinosaur.



A Few Favorite Tripawds Blogs

With hundreds of registered [Tripawds Blogs](#) – and more being started every day – it's hard to play favorites. But the following Tripawds blogs document the lives of a few three legged heroes – some who have passed, but who's people remain active members of the community.

[Jake's Journey](#) – Follows the progress of Golden Retriever Jake, taken by cancer far too soon

[Life With a Tri-Pug](#) – The life and times of canine cancer hero Maggie, the three legged pug and her pack

[My Agile Cow Dog](#) – The memoirs of Maggie, a three legged agility dog living with cancer

[The Story of Boinks](#) – Poignant advice from a couple who loved a Saint Bernard through difficult times

[The Tripawd Times of Nova the Great Dane](#) – The Inspiring Story of an Osteosarcoma Survivor

[Mackenzie, So Beautiful](#) – Life as a Tripawd Golden Retriever living with Osteosarcoma

[Denali](#) – A three legged Great Pyrenees who lost her leg to cancer

[Hurricane Rosie](#) – A fun blog about growing up mastiff with plenty of chaos to spare

[Nikki the Rottweiler](#) – The story of one dog's courageous cancer journey

[Fortis](#) – The Tripawd Cane Corso with a golden heart and his battle with cancer

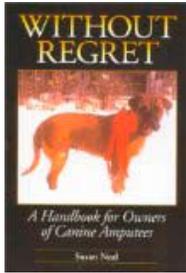
[Lincoln's Story](#) – Beautiful lessons of acceptance and courage

[And Toto, Too](#) – The rale of a terrier who fought the good fight against hemangiosarcoma

[Start your blog in minutes!](#)

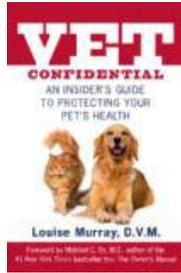
Reading List

Consider these books we have reviewed for help coping with your dog's amputation, recovery and treatment. Find more recommendations in the [Tripawds Amazon Selections](#) blog.



Never regret your decision to amputate.

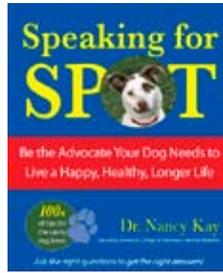
Whether struck by cancer, or a speeding car, every dog's story is different when it comes to amputation. The one common thread among all tripawds is that their people are faced with very difficult decisions, which often must be made very quickly and have life-changing results. [more...](#)



Protect Your Tripawd's Health

Today in our Discussion Forums, new Tripawds member Blackdog asked: "[How to pick a doctor for amputation?](#)"

This got us thinking about a great reference book we discussed in the Tripawd News blog a ways back, called "Vet Confidential." [more...](#)



How to be Your Dog's Best Advocate

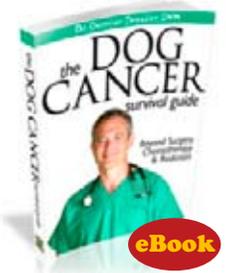
Dr. Kay, a board certified internal medicine specialist in California, was nice enough to pass along a copy of her new book "Speaking for Spot."

Always eager to read up on the latest in canine health care tips, we jumped right in and were so pleased to [more...](#)



Canine Cancer Caretaker Guide

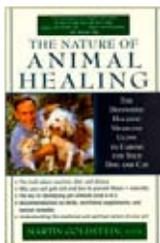
Laurie Kaplan founded the Magic Bullet Fund after her nine year old Siberian Husky "Bullet" was diagnosed with canine lymphoma. Much more than just a fund-raising tool, Help Your Dog Fight Cancer is a valuable guide filled with [more...](#)



Comprehensive Dog Cancer Survival Guide

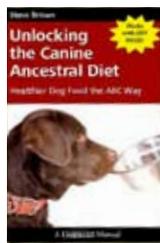
Anyone whose dog has been diagnosed with cancer will find Dr. Demian Dressler's Dog Cancer Survival Guide helpful.

The information this acclaimed veterinarian reveals has already helped thousands of other dogs, and it will help you sort through [more...](#)



Essential Holistic Veterinary Care Books

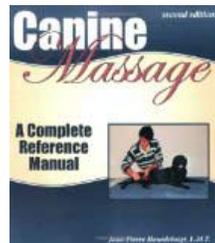
Are you interested in holistic veterinary care and natural remedies but aren't sure where to begin? Take a look at these great books written by respected professional vets that can help increase your understanding of holistic veterinary care and how it can [more...](#)



How to Eat Like Our Canine Ancestors

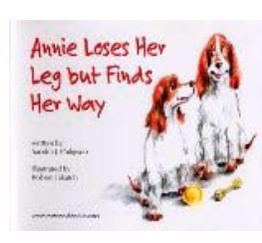
Many of us are looking for healthier foods to feed our Tripawds, but where do we begin? How do we find the time?

We can start by doing some quick homework with a new guide that shares the "canine ancestral diet" [more...](#)



Exercise and Rehab Tips for Tripawds

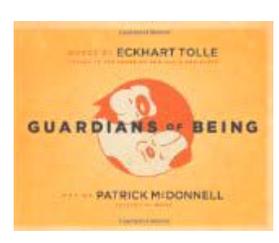
Use massage to help your dog relax, to condition the canine athlete, to assist in recovery from injuries or to ease chronic pain. Learn the techniques of a recognized expert in the field so that you can bring the well-known benefits of massage to your own dog or become a canine massage specialist. [more...](#)



Teaching Kids About Tripawds

Are you wondering how to prepare your human children about the upcoming amputation for your furry child?

Author Sandra Philipson can help. She has a darling series of children's books and even a movie about her adventurous three legged dogs [more...](#)



From Mutts Creator Patrick McDonnell

The wonderful thing about this book is it sums up the vast teachings of Eckhart Tolle in a digestible context that is a joy to read, again and again. With the help of Earl and Mooch, McDonnell has an extraordinary knack for conveying enlightening messages with deep meaning [more...](#)

Worksheets

Caregiver Information

Provide this form to pet sitters, dog walkers, or others who may care for your dog in your absence.

Contact Information

Our Name(s): _____

Our Address: _____

Nearest Cross Streets: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone #1: _____

Cell Phone #2: _____

Alternate Phone Number: _____

Emergency Numbers

Veterinary Emergency: _____

Animal Poison Control: _____

Local Taxi: _____

Veterinarian: _____

Neighbor Name/Tel: _____

Relative Name/Tel: _____

Special Instructions / Miscellaneous Notes

A Little About my Tripawd

Name: _____

Age: _____

Weight: _____

Medical Information

Medical Conditions: _____

Physical Limitations: _____

Allergies: _____

Medications

Names: _____

Dosages: _____

When: _____

How to Administer: _____

Feeding Instructions

Activity

Walk my Tripawd for _____ times each day,
_____ minutes at a time.

Do / Do Not let my Tripawd run off leash

Daily Regimen

Use this form as a daily reminder of your Tripawd's treatment plan.

Diet	Medications	Supplements	Rehab / Exercise
MORNING _____			
Breakfast _____			
Lunch _____			
Dinner _____			
EVENING _____			

Important Veterinary Questions

Prepare for your veterinarian or oncologist consultation with this list of recommended questions to ask.

Before surgery:

Is my dog in pain?

Is the amputation recovery going to be easier than living with a damaged leg?

Is my dog a candidate for amputation surgery? Can she handle the surgery and recovery?

How will her condition, size and age affect the recovery?

Additional Questions:

If cancer is suspected:

Is there a risk of the leg breaking?

What can I do to prevent it from breaking?

How will we know if it's cancer?

Will he need a biopsy? If so, what kind?

Can the biopsy wait until the leg is removed?

What kind of cancer do you suspect?

What is the prognosis?

What are my options if I don't want to amputate?

What can I expect if I don't proceed with amputation?

Additional Questions:

Proceeding with surgery?

Will you do the surgery? Or should I see a specialist?

Additional Questions:

Assessing the Practice:

Is your practice AAHA-accredited?

How often do you perform amputations?

How do you handle overnight care for your patients?

Is there an overnight employee? Are they a vet or licensed technician? Are they there all night or do they just stop by periodically?

Do you have equipment to

measure patients' blood pressure?

measure patients' red blood cell levels, such as a PCV centrifuge?

measure patients' oxygen levels, such as a pulse oximeter?

Do you use an automatic processor to develop x-rays (or do you use digital radiography?).

What types of anesthesia do you use?

Do you use an intravenous catheter on patients?

Are patients intubated during anesthesia?

Can you refer me to a patient or two of yours?

Additional Questions:

Assessing the Surgeon:

Will you leave a scapula or stump, or remove the entire area? Why or why not?

Will you use staples or stitches to close the incision? Why or why not?

What kind of pain management will you use before and after surgery?

What kind of side effects can I expect?

Can I visit my dog after surgery?

How long will you keep him?

Will someone need to be with her all day when she's released; if so, for how many days?

What should I bring when I pick him up? Should I have someone come with me to help?

What medications / supplements should be stopped before surgery?

How long can I expect the surgery to last?

Additional Questions:

After Surgery:

What should I expect after surgery? What complications should I look out for?

What if I think something is wrong? Who can I call after hours?

Where is the closest emergency facility and who should I ask for?

What were the last medications given and when? What time should I give him his next round?

When can I restart supplements?

How soon until our follow up visit?

Additional Questions:

 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

 gifts.tripawds.com
Show Your Tripawd Pride with T-Shirts, Bags, Mugs, Cards, & Other Gifts

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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

Three Legs & a Spare