

## **Setting up the House for Dogs and Cats with Mobility Challenges**

Just as we adjust the homes of our parents as they age to allow for ease of mobility and care, pets can benefit from the same consideration. Assessing needs for mobility, bedding, nutrition, and hygiene can improve the quality of life and health of your pet. If you have specific concerns not addressed here, please make sure you speak with your veterinarian.

### **Floorplan Basics**

Flooring can make a huge impact on the ability for indoor pets to get around. Floorboards and tile, especially when pets are moving quickly or shifting direction, can cause pets to jar or sprain arthritic joints and muscles. By putting non-slip runners, mats, or interlocking foam tiles down in high-traffic areas and around your pet's bed and food bowls, the risks for slips and falls are minimized. Keeping nails short and trimming hair from between footpads also improves grip. Pet-specific grippy socks are also available.

By ensuring bedding, food/water, and toileting areas are all nearby, pets can meet their essential needs without undue effort. Sometimes pets with pain will benefit from raised feeding platforms so they need not stoop down, placing more stress on the neck, back, and forelimbs. Although fancy commercial setups are available, a simple box will often do the job well, too.

If you have stairs that the pet wants to use but is struggling to do it safely, baby gates at the top and bottom of the stairs may be useful. Slings (see below) may then be used to assist them in a safe fashion.

Doorbells may be disabled to prevent the frantic door-scrambling behavior that brings pain and strains to many an older dog.

### **Mobility Aids**

Slings can be fashioned from bath towels or are available in many forms commercially to help pets get around while saving your back! These are especially helpful when helping dogs up stairs or into the car. And if necessary, carts that serve as wheelchairs are also available. Sometimes these aids are only needed short-term after surgery or injury, but can assist owners of aging pets with ongoing challenges.

You may notice that your dog or cat stops to consider or size up a jump, or just doesn't jump up onto the couch anymore. Jumping up and down is generally discouraged, but if they want to get somewhere, give them a boost so it can be done safely! Ramps, stairs, and boxes can help pets enjoy their favourite resting spots such as your bed or the window sill without putting their joints under stress.

### **Bedding**

A comfortable bed located in an area where the family congregates keeps pets involved and included in the group. Sometimes your pet may not want to interact; assess them for pain and speak to your vet before accepting this as normal. Also ensure this area is controlled for temperature so the risk of overheating or getting cold and stiff are minimized. Ensure that flies and other insects are kept away

with screening, mosquito coils, or other means as pets that are immobile are at risk of 'fly-strike' which is painful and unnecessary. Beds kept off the ground also help moisture and cold off your pet.

Look for beds with memory foam to provide support and cushion. Covers made of moisture-wicking fleece allow for quick-cleaning changes. The bed itself can be covered in a rubbish bag before placing covers on, so that only the cover need cleaning should accidents occur. Consider beds with bolster edges that can act as pillows for pets with neck pain.

### **Toileting and Hygiene**

Post-operative pets and those with limited mobility will sometimes have problems with toileting. Ask your veterinarian to clip the hair around your pet's backside so that accidents are easily cleaned and scalding is minimized. Absorbent pads and even diapers may be needed for a short time, as well. Belly wraps of many varieties work very well for male dogs with urinary incontinence. If accidents are happening frequently or the need for nappies becomes prolonged, discuss it with your vet so that he or she can be evaluated for pain and infection, function can be improved, and quality of life assessments are in place.

Cats will benefit from larger-sized litter pans with lower sides (even with portions of the sides removed) so they can get in and out easily. Cardboard boxes used for packing multiple tins or beverages work well when placed inside a plastic bag before filling with litter. Even placing litter on a blue puppy pad is an option.

Dogs may benefit from indoor toileting stations, either from fake turf or blue puppy pads. Sometimes providing increased opportunity for toileting through sling-supported walks is adequate to reduce accidents. Pet-flaps allow dogs to go outside more frequently if needed without alerting their owners.

Baby wipes and dry shampoos can be used to keep coats tidy and clean. If matting of hair is noted, mats must be removed via brushing or clipping to keep the underlying skin dry and healthy.

Monitor pets closely for pressure sores or other skin lesions as they can be very difficult to treat and often indicate a problem exists elsewhere. Prevention is a much easier route to take! If any skin issues are present, hygiene, bedding, and mobility need to be assessed. Splints, supports, and protective covers may help, too.

### **Resources for Products**

While we have no recommendations of specific products, we have compiled a four-page document full of recommendations and resource ideas for assisting you with mobility, bedding, and incontinence needs, as well as blind or deaf pets. Please let us know if you are interested in this information and we'll happily get you a copy.