

Help Keep Your Pup Happy When She's on Crate Rest

Your pup may need complete rest to recover from an injury or surgery. Boring, right? It can be daunting to keep her quiet and immobile, but can also double as an awesome time for certain games and special TLC you might not otherwise give.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Occasionally a dog needs "crate rest," or complete rest, to recover from an injury or surgery. "Rest time for recovery" is probably a better descriptive term than "crate rest"
- If your dog requires rest time for recovery, it can be a daunting task to keep him quiet, relatively immobile, and mentally stimulated
- The first thing you should do is train your dog to "settle and relax" in the location where she'll be resting and recovering
- You'll also want to keep your dog's mind challenged by teaching appropriate new tricks and games, offering food and puzzle toys, and providing lots of companionship and affection

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If you've ever taken care of a dog who required complete rest — also commonly called "crate rest" — for a lengthy period of time, you know how challenging it can be to keep a dog quiet. This is especially true in the case of young, healthy pets who are naturally physically active for a good part of the day.

There are several situations in which crate rest is called for, one of which is during treatment for a heartworm infection.

Regardless of the approach to treating heartworm (conventionally or naturally), the presence of dying worms means that pieces of decomposing worm bodies inside your dog can block blood vessels in the lungs, which can lead to a potentially fatal pulmonary embolism.

Exercise or excitement causes the heart rate to increase, which can force pieces of worms into the tiny blood vessels of the lungs. A short list of other situations that can require complete rest include:

- Treatment for intervertebral disc disease (IVDD). Intervertebral discs are subject to degeneration, bulging outward, and bursting or rupturing. When something goes wrong with a disc, the material inside escapes into the spinal column, pressing against the spinal cord or nerve roots, which causes pain, nerve damage, and sometimes, paralysis.
- Treatment for Legg-Calve-Perthes (LCP) disease, which is characterized by necrosis of the femoral head, which is the ball part of the ball-and-socket hip joint.

- Treatment for osteomyelitis, which is inflammation of the bone and/or bone marrow, caused by either a bacterial or fungal infection.
- Treatment for saddle thrombus, a very serious medical condition also called aortic thromboembolism in which a blood clot originating in the heart travels through the aorta and lodges at the "saddle," the point where the aorta splits into the left and right iliac arteries that supply the hind legs.
- Many temporary, post-surgical scenarios involving the repair or manipulation of bones and soft tissues, as well as patients with complicated wound closures or incisions.

A New Way to Look at Crate Rest

Dr. Debra Horwitz likes to use the term rest time for recovery in place of "crate rest" so owners understand their dog is recovering from a surgery or other veterinary procedure, and "to help get them on board with this sometimes arduous confinement task."¹

Horwitz recommends the following tips to help pet guardians effectively deal with their dog's boredom and remain bonded during the prescribed treatment period.

Teach Your Dog to 'Settle and Relax'

Create an environment conducive to rest time for recovery. In other words, teach your dog to be calm and relaxed at a specific location or space in your home. The goal is to train your dog to associate a command and location in the home with having a calm, relaxed posture.

According to Horwitz, you should have your dog lie on a comfy rug or blanket you will consistently use for training, and institute gentle petting, massage and a cue word to signal your dog that it's time to be calm and quiet. As he begins to relax, reward him with food and praise.

Continue to calm him until his facial expression is quiet and his breathing is soft. Consider playing music created just for dogs to help set the mood.

Initially, your dog may wonder what you're doing, just hanging out on the blanket. You may need to use a leash the first couple sessions until she knows this relaxing time is about her, and means lots of belly rubs and calming massage. Repeat this calming exercise several times a day until your dog catches on.

Target training dogs to a "Zen zone" can occur at any point, and is very beneficial when the need for physical "time outs" occur.

Train the Brain

During your dog's mandated rest time for recovery, her movements will be restricted, but her mind will still need stimulation. Teaching her tricks and games appropriate for her temporary physical restrictions will help relieve boredom.

Horwitz suggests training your dog to "shake" with one paw and then the other. You can also teach her to do a chin rest or to touch your hand with her nose on command.

You might also want to use clicker training to help your pet learn to follow quiet commands during her recovery period. Additional ideas for crate rest activities can be found in this video:

Make Mealtime Last

The idea here is to make each of your dog's meals last as long as possible to help in the quest to keep him physically quiet, but mentally engaged. You can use food and puzzle toys to both slow down his eating and challenge his brain.

One thing you don't want to do is offer any toy or puzzle that encourages your dog to move his body around. Some of the interactive toys from Nina Ottosson may be acceptable, depending on what your dog is recovering from.

Let Her Chew

Another way to mitigate your dog's boredom is to provide a variety of safe, appropriate recreational bones and chew toys to gnaw on while she's in her crate or wherever she's confined. Again, make sure not to give her anything that requires her to move her body around.

When offering recreational bones, or for any dog who tends to bite off pieces of things and swallow them, be sure to carefully supervise your pet during "chew time." Bone broth popsicles are another way to offer tasty treats that keep your dog entertained and occupied during the recovery process.

Show Him Lots and Lots of Love

Another way to keep your dog's boredom at bay is to replace activity with affection. Be sure to keep him as close to you as possible, especially when you're engaged in quiet activities like reading, watching TV, or surfing the internet. When you take your dog outside to potty, ask other family members to come along. Trips to outdoor potty spots are a welcome change of scenery for a dog on complete rest, so encourage family members to tag along and offer lots of attention and affection.

Horwitz recommends restricting visitors during this time. She also suggests keeping your dog's crate away from windows to discourage barking or other forms of physical stimulation.

Avoid the Outdoors

Finally, you'll need to keep your recovering canine companion indoors except for potty breaks to prevent unexpected bursts of excitement or physical activity. It's also important to keep your dog on a leash during trips outside to prevent her from "stretching her legs" or trying to chase a squirrel up a tree.

Sources and References

¹ [dvm360, March 25, 2016](#)