

## Chapter 7

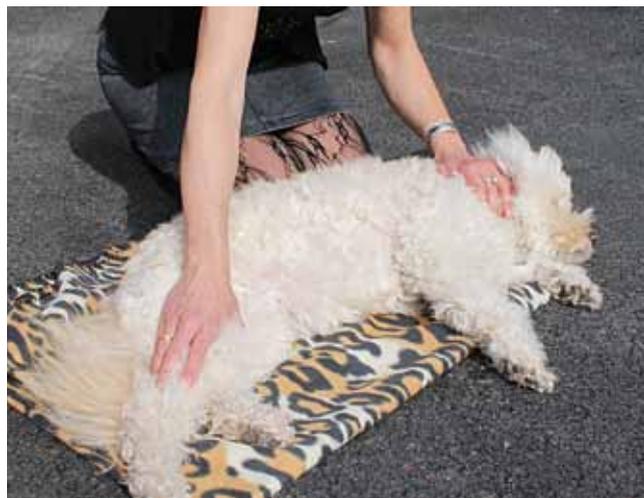
# What can the physiotherapist do to help?

The physiotherapist offers a range of techniques to treat your dog according to his needs, to promote healing, build muscle, strengthen ligaments, and relieve tension. He or she will also explain and demonstrate which of these techniques you can use at home, and how to do them safely. And you may even be able to borrow some equipment to do the exercises at home.

The most commonly used techniques used are:

### Massage

Massage is very relaxing, relieves tension, and thereby eliminates muscle pain. Toning techniques encourage blood circulation and increase oxygen supply to the muscles. One massage technique, effleurage, is particularly good at helping to re-establish mobility.



# Chapter 9

## Aquatherapy

At last, the wounds have healed, the stitches have been removed, and the vet has no objection to a spot of aquatherapy. Perhaps you have heard of the underwater treadmill but aren't quite sure what it is?

After a detailed conversation with the therapist, and possibly an opportunity to explore the actual treadmill, you'll see that it really is quite an impressive device.

Like most Retrievers, Aisha is excited about anything that is wet and has to do with water, and finds the warm and humid smells tempting. But what a large tank full of water, technical stuff everywhere, and strange noises! Aisha is extremely curious!

Dr Häusler advises at her practice:

“For the first treatment, it is important to reassure the animal



*Underwater exercises offer many advantages, including greatly improved mobility.*

and owner alike, because they are both bound to feel anxious and unsure about the new situation. For the first visit, I recommend taking something along for the four-legged patient – this could be a treat or a dearly-loved toy. You could bring

a few different things and conjure them out of the bag, so that your dog considers this occasion exciting and not frightening. The first treatment will vary from dog to dog. Duffy has no reluctance about getting on the treadmill. Dart is completely different – he needs time and lots of encouragement. Dart’s mistress finds it frustrating that her dog refuses to climb the steps to the treadmill. ‘He’s not usually like this,’ she complains impatiently.

Rule number one: Keep calm! “It doesn’t matter,” explains Dr Häusler to her, “Dart is a careful dog, which is a really positive thing. An impulsive dog could be in danger of injuring himself. Over time, and with encouragement, his anxiety will lessen; if he comes in all stressed and tense then this is counterproductive. A tense body cannot train properly, and could even suffer injury. He would also return home with the impression that this is a nasty place, where he experienced bad things. And next time, he would be in a state of anxiety before he had even got in the door.

“At last, we manage to get Dart on the treadmill. I let it go up first and then move it sideways across the pool. Finally, I let it down very slowly, until Dart has his feet in the water. Friendly persuasion and lots of praise reassure him that everything is okay. Toys and treats

are an excellent distraction. Next, I sink the treadmill bit by bit into the water. It is fairly warm, so Dart isn’t cold – yet it takes him a while to realise that all these strange things aren’t a threat to him.

“The deeper the dog is lowered into the water, the greater the support for his joints. This is all new for him, and he can’t control the motion of the treadmill. Gradually, however, he will begin to feel relief from pain. When the treadmill begins to move, he is puzzled at first, and then very soon realises that he can actually run on the strange surface – and is praised effusively for it.

“This first session with the underwater treadmill is not so much about training, but merely to reassure the dog that he will come to no harm. These early experiences are crucial for further therapy sessions. If he decides at the end of the session that it wasn’t too terrible, but actually quite fun, next time, he will be happy to participate in the treatment. Even the owners, who had previously believed that their dog was either afraid of water, or was very stubborn, are fully convinced about the benefits of the training after the third or fourth time. Dogs usually notice very quickly what does them good, or can quickly become convinced.”

It is fascinating to watch a dog on the underwater treadmill, which allows them to work on many

### *Heat therapy*

Heat improves circulation, increases metabolism, and relaxes the muscles. It will also make the connective tissue (eg joint capsules) more flexible, which increases mobility. The physiotherapist uses infrared lamps or hot packs (see *Useful accessories*) before exercise therapy.

### *Cold therapy*

Reduces swelling and inflammation (for cold packs, see *Useful accessories*).

### *Ultrasound therapy*

While hot packs and infrared radiation heat the outer layer of the body, ultrasound reaches the deeper layers. The heat generated there reduces muscle tension and pain, and improves circulation, which in turn speeds up the healing process. This therapy improves joint function, and some of the existing stiffness will ease. Depending on the sound intensity used, penetration depth is 1-5cm, which will have a beneficial effect on the joint capsule.

*Top left: Your hands should form a soft and uniform shape during effleurage.*

*Left: The positive influence that massage has on the circulatory system can help promote healing.*

### *Electro-therapy (TENS)*

TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) stimulates the skin using mild electrical impulses on the nerves, and blocks pain signals before they can be received by the brain. You may have seen this device already in your physiotherapist's practice, as it is also used on humans. During a treatment, you will see that the muscle in your dog's leg gently twitches, possibly relieving tension and easing pain, allowing him to relax enough to doze for a while. These minimal movements help build new muscle tissue, and thus prevent muscular atrophy (muscle wasting). At the same time, the process will regenerate nerve tissue and bone.

Due to a small change in posture and unnatural weight-bearing, Aisha has tension in her back. You probably know how this feels if you have ever suffered from backache: it hurts.

Dogs howl if they feel a sudden pain. With longer-lasting pain, however, they suffer in silence, and, unlike us, can't say where it hurts. If the physiotherapist can reduce or completely eliminate muscle tightness by applying brief electrical stimulation, this is such a relief for Aisha.

It's possible you may be able to borrow this piece of equipment to treat your dog at home.

Additional applications for this

**TIP**

If you have already used a clicker, you will know that you can 'tell' your dog exactly what you want him to do with it. If not, see *Useful accessories* for more information.



*The half-sitting position – virtually a squat – is a great workout for the hindquarters, but initially difficult for the dog to learn.*



*Crawling under a bench requires good co-ordination and is suitable only for experienced patients. If your dog is reluctant to do this, please do not try and force him.*

him and hold his stomach off the floor with your hands underneath him. After a few repetitions, he will understand what's required.

Using a treat, encourage your dog to creep halfway under the bench, then tempt him with a toy, which he should try to grab and pull out from under the bench. Once he has the toy in his mouth,

gradually loosen your grip on it. Just before he's about to give up, let him have the 'prize' and praise him.

In this exercise, Argos tries to fool me by lying down on the ground and then sliding under the bench. I don't give him his treat – instead, I push my toes under his tummy so that he can't get