



## Post-Operative Instructions: Thoracotomy

### **Summary:**

Thank you for trusting your pet to our surgical care. Your pet is being discharged after open chest surgery. Thoracic (chest) surgery is performed through either a lateral thoracotomy (approach between the ribs) or median sternotomy (approach through the sternum). Both require at least 2-3 weeks for full recovery. Most pets are sore for several days and it is essential to allow your pet quiet time to heal and to avoid injury during recuperation. Please strictly follow the instructions below.

### **Recovery Instructions:**

#### **1. Activity:**

- *No running, jumping, free access to stairs, or rough playing with other pets or children.*
- Do not allow any unrestricted or off-leash activity, or free access to stairs or slippery floors.
- Activity must be limited to very short leash walks three times daily for the purpose of going outside to the bathroom *only*.
- Restrict activity for the next 2 weeks to allow complete healing of the surgical site.

#### **2. Incision:**

- Monitor the incision daily for signs of infection such as increased redness, swelling or discharge. If you observe any of these signs or if the surgical site suddenly becomes painful to the touch please call us immediately.
- If your pet licks the incision, he/she must wear an E-collar until the staples are removed as licking can provide a source of infection.
- Keep the incision clean and dry (do not apply anything to the incision). No bathing or swimming for 14 days.

#### **3. Medications:**

- Give all medications as directed and call us if you believe your pet is having an adverse reaction to any of the prescriptions.
- If your pet loses his/her appetite, begins vomiting or develops diarrhea or dark/tarry stools please call us immediately.

#### **4. Food:**

- Your pet should have access to water at all times and eat his/her normal diet.

#### **5. Recovery:**

- Your pet should show steady, continual improvement. If he/she seems lethargic, acutely painful or simply not doing well please call us immediately.

**6. Recheck:**

- Please schedule an appointment for suture/staple removal 10-12 days after surgery

**7. Chest Bandage:**

- Frequently pets are discharged with a bandage to cover the surgery site and the site of the chest tube. Managing this bandage properly is very important. Please note the location of the bandage on the chest and call if it slips. Additionally, bandages may become too constrictive: if your pet has ANY difficulty breathing (for example, he/she is breathing more rapidly than normal) please call us immediately.

**8. Breathing:**

- Monitoring your pet's breathing is very important. We are expecting your pet to recover uneventfully, but thoracic surgery can leave him/her with residual air in the chest cavity. This generally resolves over a period of several days. Depending on the indication for surgery, additional air may accumulate and your pet may develop dyspnea (difficulty breathing). This is often signaled by cyanosis or blue-tinged gums. **Difficulty breathing is considered an emergency situation!** Call immediately if you have any questions or concerns about your pet's breathing.

**9. Questions:**

- Our foremost interest is your pet's rapid and complete recovery: Do not hesitate to call if you have any questions or concerns.