



## Using Orthotic or Prosthetic Devices for Cats

The use of custom orthotic and prosthetic devices for dogs is well established. Use of such devices in cats is less common. This is due to a number of important factors: 1) fewer cats receive veterinary care and therefore fewer cats are diagnosed with injuries amenable to these devices; 2) cat fur is slippery and in some cases retention of an orthosis or socket-based prosthesis can be challenging; 3) the shape of cat limbs and paws also add interesting challenges in terms of device design and device retention; 4) there are fewer orthopedic injuries in cats because they do not participate in formal sports; 5) lastly and very importantly, not all cats are behaviorally suited for application of a device (see below).

### Types of Injuries

Even so, orthopedic injuries do occur in cats and proper veterinary care is necessary. The following is a good list, but does not include all potential injuries.

- **Front limb:** paw and carpus (wrist) injuries for orthosis; injuries or congenital (birth) defects from the carpus (wrist) down for socket based prosthesis
- **Pelvic limb:** paw, tarsus (ankle), stifle (knee) injuries for orthosis; injuries or congenital (birth) defects from the tarsus (ankle) down for socket based prosthesis

### Behavioral Considerations

Not all cats will allow handling of their limbs to the extent required to apply a device. Candidate cats must be 1) calm enough to sit quietly while they are held for up to 10 minutes; 2) allow extensive manipulation of the injured limb including gentle squeezing; and 3) tolerate materials being attached to the body (e.g. collar, harness, etc.).

Some additional ways of testing: 1) placing a light bandage on the limb and monitor for acclimation over several days. 2) Any cat that is not willing to allow toenail trimming may not be easily trainable to use of a device.

Some cats are trainable even if they don't meet the criteria noted above, but considerable patience and commitment to training is necessary.

### Tips and tricks if a device is to be used:

It can take some cats weeks to months to adjust to wearing the prosthetic slipper. Some of the following behaviors may occur during this time:

- Unwilling to stand up (lying down or crawling)
- Spinning on the ground
- Shaking the limb with the device on
- Biting at the device
- Crying/Meowing
- Biting or swatting at people

Tricks to encourage calm behavior:



- Provide special food treats that are only given when the device is in use
- Put prosthesis on for feeding times 2 times per day to link device with good things
- Find a quiet, small space where your cat cannot hide from you. Avoid spaces with furniture that the cat can hide under. Hiding under furniture can create a problem in retrieving your cat and cause your cat to become aggressive (biting or swatting at you). A small bathroom can be a good space initially.
- Keep other animals (cats and dogs) or young children out of the area to avoid extra excitement and stress for your cat.

### **Training Recommendations**

Cats can be trained. The keys to successful use of an orthosis or prosthesis are:

- 1) Proper patient selection;
- 2) Follow donning and doffing instructions;
- 3) Follow provided wearing instructions (in general very short wearing sessions of 5-10 minutes are advised at first); as your cat acclimates to the device longer sessions are encouraged.
- 4) Provide high value food treats only provided during device use such as canned cat food, chicken, fish, etc.
- 5) Take the device off when your cat is calm rather than when it is upset whenever possible. This provided positive reinforcement for calm behavior.
- 6) Go slowly and take your time. In general cats take more time to adjust and learn to use the device than do dogs.
- 7) Contact your veterinarian or OrthoPets if you are concerned about behaviors that are extreme or are not improving.

### **Final Comments**

Importantly, stressed cats can become aggressive even if they have never been aggressive. Please be prepared and talk with your veterinarian or A Loyal Companion about safe handling prior to using the device. We recommend proper and safe restraint techniques be demonstrated by your veterinarian prior to your applying the device at home.

**Prior to initiating device fabrication, we recommend thorough case discussion with A Loyal Companion.**



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