

OWNER REHABILITATION GUIDE

TPLO Rehab Daily Logs

Weekly walking, exercise, and safety checklists

Owner-editable Word source • Recheck X-ray timing: 10–12 weeks when indicated

Owner-editable daily sheets for the TPLO rehab package. Use this as the fridge/checklist tool beside the written discharge instructions from the surgical team. For exercise setup photos and examples, use smallanimalsurgeon.com/tplo-rehab-package.html.

Primary rule

Use the written discharge instructions and check-in plan first. If a dog becomes more painful, stops using the leg, the incision worsens, or the plan no longer seems to fit, pause progression and ask the surgical team.

Use these rules throughout recovery

- **Progression rule:** Do not progress just because the calendar changed. Move forward when the current step is slow, controlled, and even.
- **Incision photo rule:** Send a photo to drwood@smallanimalsurgeon.com if you are worried about incision healing and you see incision opening, discharge, or 2 or more of: redness, pain, heat, swelling.
- **Check-ins:** Your surgical team will guide check-ins and tell you when to send updates, videos, or photos.

Set up the house first

Make the house boring, grippy, and predictable before the dog comes home and while early recovery is underway.

Setup item	What to prepare
Non-slip flooring	Use runners, mats, carpet scraps, yoga mats, stall mats, or foam mats where your dog will walk.
Confinement area	Choose a crate or small gated room where the dog can rest without other pets jumping or playing.
Short leash kit	Put the leash on before opening doors. Early walks are for toileting and controlled movement only.

Setup item	What to prepare
Food, water, sling	Elevated dishes, a sling or belly support if needed, and small treats make the first week easier.
Block furniture and stairs	Block beds, couches, vehicles, and stairs unless the stairs are unavoidable and assisted.
Cone or collar	The cone protects the incision. Licking can set recovery back, so it stays on unless directed otherwise.
Plan the tunnel squat space	Choose a hallway, wall and couch, or safe barriers that can make a narrow space. The tunnel changes the space so the surgical leg has to help, without you pulling or pushing the leg.

Weekly progression at a glance

Stage	Walking	Exercises	Checks / limits
Days 1-3	Bathroom only, about 3-5 min at a time	Short leash walks, massage, range of motion, home icing	Strict confinement. Daily incision checks. Cone on unless directed otherwise.
Days 4-14	Controlled toileting outings up to about 5 min, 3-4 times daily	Continue massage and range of motion; start gentle front-leg tripod balance if calm	Still a protection phase. Necessary entry steps only with leash and sling/towel support.
Week 3	5 min twice daily	Tunnel squats	Entry steps only.
Week 4	10 min twice daily	Big circles; continue tunnel squats	Stair check-in for dogs over 55 kg.
Week 5	15 min twice daily	Continue tunnel squats and big circles	Follow check-in plan for stairs.
Week 6	20 min twice daily	Small circles / figure 8s; continue tunnel squats	Stair check-in for dogs 55 kg or less.
Week 7	25 min twice daily	Continue tunnel squats and small circles / figure 8s	Follow check-in plan.
Week 8 to clearance	Controlled leash walks can be unlimited if comfortable	Keep movement controlled; no new high-impact activity	No trotting, off-leash activity, running, jumping, ball play, or rough play until cleared.

After X-ray clearance

Use this section only after your dog has been cleared to progress after the recheck X-rays.

- **Start after clearance:** Once cleared after recheck X-rays, increase activity slowly over the next few weeks. Move from structured rehab toward normal pet activity while avoiding sudden high-impact exercise.
- **Build walking first:** Increase walking distance first. Add short controlled trotting only when walking is comfortable, even, and calm.
- **Increase one thing at a time:** Change only one category at a time: distance, speed, hills, play, or exercise difficulty.
- **If soreness appears:** If your dog becomes more lame, stiff, sore later that day, or worse the next morning, reduce activity and return to the previous comfortable level for several days.

- **Healing still continues:** The knee keeps healing and remodeling for several more months. Many dogs feel better before healing is fully mature.
- **Strength work long term:** Most family pets do not need a strict rehab routine forever, but small strength exercises several times per week are helpful.
- **Easy walk options:** During walks, add gentle hills, controlled curb walking, figure 8s, or short sit-to-stand exercises.
- **Easy home options:** At home, use gentle tug of war, backing up, balance work, or controlled sit-to-stands before meals.
- **Lean, fit, and strong:** Walking is excellent for fitness, but strength work adds something different. Keeping your dog lean, fit, and strong may reduce stress on the opposite knee.
- **Omega-3 support:** Use fish oil or omega-3 support only if it has been recommended.

Recovery examples: eight public albums

These are the same public rehabilitation albums linked from the TPLO rehab webpage.

Stage	Recovery example	Public iCloud album
Day 1-2	After surgery - recovery begins	Open iCloud album
Week 1	Incision check and first steps	Open iCloud album
Week 2	Suture removal and mobility review	Open iCloud album
Week 4 example	Early strength building	Open iCloud album
Week 6 example	Functional recovery	Open iCloud album
Week 8 example	X-rays and activity progression	Open iCloud album
Month 3 example	Full mobility and conditioning	Open iCloud album
Month 6 example	Return to play / final clearance	Open iCloud album

Week 1 daily log

Days 1-3: bathroom only, about 3-5 min at a time, plus home icing. Days 4-7: controlled toileting outings up to about 5 min. Daily checks / limits: cone on unless directed otherwise; no licking/chewing; no running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or stair exercise.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Incision check - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Look before activity. Cone stays on unless directed otherwise.
Toileting leash walk - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Days 1-3 bathroom only; Days 4-7 controlled toileting up to about 5 min.
	Days 1-3 bathroom only			Days 4-7 controlled toileting up to about 5 min.				
Home icing - Days 1-3 only	☐	☐	☐	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Towel barrier, incision dry. Ice 10-15 min, 3-4 times daily. Stop if distressed, skin irritated, or foot cold/swollen.
Massage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	3-5 minutes of light massage if comfortable. Stay away from incision.
Range of motion / bicycle motion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5-10 slow comfortable movements if tolerated.
Gentle front-leg tripod balance - Days 4+ only	N/A	N/A	N/A	☐	☐	☐	☐	Begin only if calm and non-slip. Do not lift the non-surgical hind leg unless specifically shown.
EVENING								
Incision check - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Compare with morning: redness, swelling, drainage, licking, opening.
Toileting leash walk - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Short, slow, controlled.
	Days 1-3 bathroom only			Days 4-7 controlled toileting up to about 5 min.				
Home icing - Days 1-3 only	☐	☐	☐	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Towel barrier, incision dry. Ice 10-15 min, 3-4 times daily. Stop if distressed, skin irritated, or foot cold/swollen.
Massage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	3-5 minutes of light massage if comfortable. Stay away from incision.
Range of motion / bicycle motion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Optional second set if comfortable.
Gentle front-leg tripod balance - Days 4+ only	N/A	N/A	N/A	☐	☐	☐	☐	Begin only if calm and non-slip. Do not lift the non-surgical hind leg unless specifically shown.

Week 2 daily log

Days 8-14. Controlled toileting outings up to about 5 min, 3-4 times daily. This is still a protection phase.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Incision check - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Keep checking even if it looks good.
Toileting leash walk - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled toileting outing up to about 5 min.
Massage	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Continue 3-5 minutes only if comfortable.
Range of motion / bicycle motion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5-10 slow comfortable movements if tolerated.
Front-leg tripod balance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	One slow 10-count if calm and non-slip.
EVENING								
Incision check - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Compare with morning.
Toileting leash walk - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled toileting outing up to about 5 min.
Range of motion / bicycle motion	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Optional second set if comfortable.
Front-leg tripod balance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Optional second 10-count if calm.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
No running, jumping, furniture, or rough play	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Necessary entry steps only.
Week note								Do not allow free roaming indoors. Keep the pace slow enough that your dog places the surgical foot down instead of hopping.

Week 3 daily log

Walk: 5 minutes twice daily. Stairs: entry steps only.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Morning walk - 5 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Slow leash walk. No pulling, hopping, trotting, or rushing.
Tunnel squats - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps. Reward a slow, even sit.
EVENING								
Evening walk - 5 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Same calm pace.
Tunnel squats - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps. Stop if twisting, rushing, or sore.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
Home setup kept narrow/boring/grippy	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Environment should make even leg use easier.
No running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or off-leash activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Week note								Tunnel work is about making the surgical leg participate. Judge success by evenness, not perfect squats.

Week 4 daily log

Walk: 10 minutes twice daily. Stairs: check-in for dogs over 55 kg.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Morning walk - 10 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Stay slow and controlled; no trotting.
Tunnel squats - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps. Narrow slightly only if sit stays controlled.
Big circles - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds each direction, large and slow.
EVENING								
Evening walk - 10 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Stay controlled; no trotting.
Tunnel squats - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps.
Big circles - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds each direction.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
Stair plan followed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dogs over 55 kg: review at check-in.
No running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or off-leash activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Week note								Big circles should look slow and boring. If one direction is much harder, keep the circle larger.

Week 5 daily log

Walk: 15 minutes twice daily. Stairs: follow the check-in plan.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Morning walk - 15 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled pace.
Tunnel squats - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps. Continue narrowing only if the sit is slow and even.
Big circles - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds each direction.
EVENING								
Evening walk - 15 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled pace.
Tunnel squats - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps.
Big circles - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds each direction.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
Any fatigue or next-day soreness recorded	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Do not increase difficulty if sore.
No running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or off-leash activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Week note								This is still controlled strengthening. More difficult is not better unless the movement stays even.

Week 6 daily log

Walk: 20 minutes twice daily. Stairs: check-in for dogs 55 kg or less.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Morning walk - 20 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled pace.
Tunnel squats - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps.
Small circles / figure 8s - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds, easy pattern first.
EVENING								
Evening walk - 20 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled pace.
Tunnel squats - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps.
Small circles / figure 8s - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
Stair check-in completed or plan followed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Dogs 55 kg or less: review at check-in.
Any soreness after tighter turning recorded	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Return to larger circles if sore or uneven.
No running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or off-leash activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Week note								Small circles are a rotation-control exercise. Keep speed slow and turns smooth.

Week 7 daily log

Walk: 25 minutes twice daily. Stairs: follow the check-in plan.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Morning walk - 25 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled pace.
Tunnel squats - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps if the sit stays slow and even.
Small circles / figure 8s - morning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds.
EVENING								
Evening walk - 25 min	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Controlled pace.
Tunnel squats - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	5 reps if the sit stays slow and even.
Small circles / figure 8s - evening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	30 seconds.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
Stair plan followed	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Household stairs only if approved.
Any rushing, soreness, uneven turning, or crooked sit recorded	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Make setup easier or pause.
No running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or off-leash activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Week note								Keep circles and figure 8s slow enough that your dog walks instead of trotting, pivoting, or rushing through the turn.

Week 8 and until X-ray clearance daily log

Controlled leash walks can be unlimited if comfortable and the surgical leg is being used well. No high-impact activity yet.

Task	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Notes / pattern
MORNING								
Morning controlled leash walk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Can be longer if comfortable, slow, and controlled.
EVENING								
Evening controlled leash walk	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Can be longer if comfortable, slow, and controlled.
DAILY CHECKS / LIMITS								
Stairs remained controlled household access,	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Only if stair flights were approved.
No running, jumping, furniture, rough play, or off-leash activity	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Week note								After the Week 8 update or video is reviewed, the team decides whether sedated recheck X-rays are appropriate now or closer to 10–12 weeks.