



**Marie Ballengee**  
DVM, CCRP, cVMA  
**Pawsitive Steps Pet Rehab  
and Fitness Clinic**

Since her graduation from NCSU College of Veterinary Medicine in 2002, she has been a small animal practitioner in the Triad. Her undergraduate degree is a BS Pharmacy from Purdue University. She shares her home with a cat and two rescued Doberman Pinschers.

Marie Ballengee, DVM, CCRP, cVMA opened Pawsitive Steps Pet Rehab and Fitness Clinic, located in Burlington, NC, in December 2014. She was the first Rehabilitation Veterinarian in the Triad - obtaining her Certification as a Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner in 2006 from the University of Tennessee and was employed by Carolina Veterinary Specialists from 2006-2008. In 2009, she received her Certification in Medical Veterinary Acupuncture from Colorado State.

## PHYSICAL REHABILITATION

### Let's keep your pet moving!

Our pets are members of the family! Veterinary medical care often mirrors our own healthcare. We expect the same level of treatment for our fur-babies that we would receive. Physical rehabilitation or physical therapy is commonplace in human medicine - and it is becoming more common for our animal companions too!

Most of us have had physical therapy (or know someone that has!). It is prescribed after an injury or surgery, for treatment of a chronic condition like arthritis, to manage our weight or to condition our bodies for athletics. It can be helpful for our pets for many of the same reasons! Benefits, for any of us, include speeding recovery, decreasing pain, improving strength, flexibility and mobility, or preventing new injury - ultimately improving quality of life!

I have experienced physical rehabilitation from both personal and professional perspectives! My very first rehabilitation case in 2005 was my own dog. Bosco was an 85 lb. Doberman that ruptured a disc in his back and was unable to walk. I understand first-hand what is required in the care of a "downed" pet. But I also got to see the positive effects of physical rehabilitation - he had a full recovery of hindlimb function after his surgery. This spurred my desire to help other pets even more!

In physical rehabilitation, we use many of the same techniques that are utilized in human physical therapy. The more common modalities include: thermotherapy (heat/cold), massage, hydrotherapy, therapeutic exercise, acupuncture, therapeutic laser, electrical stimulation, therapeutic ultrasound and manual therapy. An individualized assessment and treatment plan is developed for each pet. The type of therapy used is determined by that animal's needs and issues.

It is sometimes difficult to see our fur-babies getting older. Most will show some signs of osteoarthritis, from the wear and tear of life. They may be moving slower and acting uncomfortable. Physical rehabilitation can be a nice addition to the regimen of appropriate weight, supplements and medication. Proper exercise can assist in building and maintaining muscle strength. Muscles keep the joints from hurting as much. So, if we get your pet stronger, it will be easier to

"keep them moving"! The underwater treadmill is one type of exercise that can give your pet a more comfortable and effective workout session. The water provides support for weakened pets, keeps them from experiencing excessively "pounding" joints, helps build strength and, if needed, helps them to lose weight. Acupuncture and laser are other modalities that can be helpful for pain management. Getting your pet stronger and feeling less pain will get them back to the normal activities of life - taking walks, playing with toys, etc.

Obesity is an epidemic in our modern world! It is estimated that between 30-60% of pets are overweight. We have research showing that pets that are overweight have an earlier onset of arthritis symptoms and shortened life spans. Also, we have learned that fat is a metabolically active tissue - releasing detrimental hormones into our bodies. We need to keep in mind that our pets are not built like us and additional weight impacts them more dramatically. With their horizontal body structure, their joints and back are more easily affected by extra weight - making it harder to get around. Weight loss is usually more effective with a combination of calorie reduction and exercise. With some pets it can be challenging to exercise, especially if they have other health issues. Rehab can help to "jump start" a weight loss program and get your furry companion to move around more. Happier dogs usually wag their tails more - and who doesn't love to see that!

Some of the most dramatic cases of recovery are with neurologic patients. These are commonly long-backed dogs that have intervertebral disc disease (IVDD or herniated disc) - that may or may not have had surgery, depending on symptoms. Or those pets suffering a fibrocartilagenous embolism (FCE or spinal cord stroke). Many of these fur-babies have difficulty or are unable to walk. Their therapy involves multiple modalities and medication to help regain function and strength. Owners play a very important role in helping their pet recover. It is so gratifying for me to help get a beloved companion that can't move back to walking again!

Pets that have had some type of orthopedic injury, surgery or deformity (e.g., hip dysplasia) can benefit too! If our pets are unable to use their bodies correctly, they are not bearing weight properly. This sets them up to lose muscle mass and strength. Also, this puts an abnormal strain on other parts of the body. Exercises are targeted to promote use and strength of the affected areas. We, as veterinary professionals, recognize that often crate rest alone does not get our furry friends back to full function. Physical rehab can provide a nice, controlled energy outlet - especially useful for young and active dogs!

A special subset of dogs that can take advantage of physical rehabilitation are working and athletic dogs. These pets are already very active but many can benefit from additional strength training to maximize their ability to perform at an optimal level and to prevent injury. If injury does occur, rehab may be necessary to return them back to peak performance. They are generally really fun patients to deal with because of their high desire to work!

Our pets are such an important and vital part of our lives! They deserve the best care available. Almost all pets can benefit from physical rehabilitation at some point during their lives. The "use it or lose it" principle applies to both humans and our animal companions. Keeping our pets moving helps them to be stronger and healthier and hopefully, live longer lives. As rehabilitation specialists, we are here to help you to restore and maintain your pet's mobility, fitness and comfort - resulting in your fur-baby having the longest, best life possible!

*See ad on page 16.*