

## **Physiotherapy for DM (CDRM) dogs**

Sabre was diagnosed two months away from his ninth birthday. The initial effects of it were so severe in that he was constantly falling over and unable even to squat without collapsing that I thought I would lose him within weeks. Somebody mentioned the Disabled Animals Club which I joined and then asked for suggestions. They said try physiotherapy. Through ACPAT I found one in Hemel Hempstead and drove Sabre there once a week. This journey was a masochist's dream. Sabre loves riding in the car to the extent that he barks with delight for the entire ride, in this case around 120 miles round trip. Turning the stereo up only increased his volume as, sitting as far to the rear as he could, he serenaded me while staring at me in the rear view mirror.

The physiotherapist, who works regularly with the Royal Veterinary College, said that he had lost all feeling in the left leg. He did not know where it was. He had to be taught not only where his leg was but also to increase his base of support. The dog has a tendency to stand with their rear paws almost together giving them a very narrow, almost pointed, base of support. She showed me a few simple exercises which I should perform five to six times a day on him. Within a week he was standing much better. After four weeks he was doing fine and has continued to do so for almost three years.

These are the exercises which are carried out on **both** rear legs. The dog will associate the feeling he gets in the good leg with what he should be feeling in the not so good leg.

These are done with the dog lying on his side.

### **Muscle Stretches.**

#### **1 Hip Flexers.**

This is simply slipping one hand beneath the top of the hip to support it. If the dog's left leg is being worked on your left hand would be slipped between the dog's belly and hip so that the left hand is supporting the hip bone at the joint with the next bone. Virtually our 'knee'. The right hand then holds the leg at the 'ankle/paw area and the leg is straightened out backwards to its full extent. Do this three to four times.

**2 Hip Abductors.** This is a very important exercise. It is strengthening the muscle that keeps the leg straight. With one hand under the hip, supporting the hip bone and the other supporting the leg below the knee lift the hip slightly upwards away, vertically away from the body until slight resistance is felt. You will see that there is a triangular section of the dog's skin that is being stretched by this action, do not overdo the pressure, and hold that position while you count to five. Release and repeat five times. The dog's paw should be down near the floor when you are doing this. It is only the hip that you wish to lift away.

#### **Back**

Starting at the base of the ears work your fingers gently down on each side of the spine as though gently massaging the spine.

#### **Balance. (Assuming left leg is affected one)**

With him standing position his back legs so they are nice and square then gently push him on the right hand side of his back leg over towards his left leg. What you are aiming to make him do is reposition his leg himself. You can also achieve this by gently swaying him from side to side causing him to have to transfer his weight from one leg to the other to keep from falling over.

2. With him standing lift his rear right leg off the ground to make him stand on his left leg for a few seconds. Do this five times.

3. With him sitting lift alternate front legs off the ground.

#### **Passive Movements.**

Do all the joints in the back legs.

Working down the leg there are four joints. Hip, then hip to the first leg bone (knee?) then ankle then paw. The hip has already been done so supporting the hip stretch the upper leg back as far as it will go and hold for a few seconds. Then as far forward as it will go and hold for a few seconds.

Do this five times then move down the leg to the next joint remembering always to hold the leg above the joint you wish to work on.

So if you were flexing the paw you would be holding the leg between the ankle and the paw.

**Tail Rolling**

This is just taking the base of the tail and slowly wag it both in the hanging down position and then as though the dog were wagging it when it is held high. This helps the dogs balance.