Vet's Corner – Physiotherapy for Greyhounds

Sarah Cruickshank, Veterinary Physiotherapist
MSc (Vet Physio) London, BHSc (Physio), MNZSP

Animal physiotherapy is a rapidly growing area of physiotherapy and is a dynamic and exciting profession to be involved in. Physiotherapy can help to prevent injury, alleviate pain or stiffness, improve gait, balance and posture, promote and maintain fitness and health, improve quality of life and provide advice and support to owners.

How intensively your greyhound raced and the reason they retired, whether through injury or age, will affect the aches and pains that they may have. Common areas of pain and or stiffness in the retired greyhound are spine, carpus (wrist), toes, and hock.

The above may be due to old soft tissue injuries around the joint (ligament, tendon, cartilage or joint capsule), or joint wear and tear-osteoarthritis or OA, sometimes referred to as degenerative joint disease or DJD.

Common muscle injuries (old racing injuries or more acute recent injuries):

- hamstrings (muscles at the back of the thigh)
- adductor and gracilis (inner thigh muscles)
- shoulder muscles (triceps and biceps)
- brachiocephalicus (neck and shoulder)

What to look for:

- Morning stiffness or pain
- stiffness after exercise when cooled down
- intermittent lameness
- any thickening, swelling or heat in a joint
- trouble eating from food bowl
- reluctant to jump into car/onto bed or sofa
- difficulty with stairs

If your greyhound exhibits any of these behaviours it may be a good idea to discuss this with your vet, they may decide to examine your greyhound, and depending on their findings may refer you to a physiotherapist for treatment.

Specific management – from a physio perspective:

coats – to keep them warm and dry

collars – a wide greyhound collar is essential! Due to their long and vulnerable necks, the pressure of collar must be distributed over a wide area.

bedding – raised beds if outside to prevent damp, if inside a large thick (preferably wool stuffed) bed. The bed should be large enough for your greyhound to comfortably stretch out on it's side. AVOID hard plastic beds which are normally too small for a greyhound, they must have a bed they can stretch out fully on. Large rectangular beds with padded edges are great.

raised food and water bowls – essential to reduce strain on the neck and thoracic spine (try a bowl on an upturned bucket and see how your greyhound can eat in a more comfortable position.

nail care – regular inspection of the toes and nails to check for any sand cracks or sores, tender or swollen toes indicative of a toe injury. Keeping nails short reduces the strain on the toe joints and soft tissue.

exercise surface – a firm sandy beach is ideal! Caution with slippery or muddy paddocks in wet weather if your hound likes to reach top speed when exercising off lead. Muscle strains can occur when turning or accelerating/decelerating on slippery surfaces.

home flooring – especially with more time inside over winter, if you have wood, lino or laminate flooring strategically placed non-slip mats or rugs are important. Slippery floors are a common cause of injury in canines.

transfers – consider lifting your greyhound in and out of the car or purchasing/making a ramp to minimise impact on the joints

joint supplements – if your greyhound is getting older, or had a hard racing career, consider discussing joint supplements with your vet to help maintain healthy joints.

Greyhounds are wonderful to assess and treat – they love 'hands on' attention, and are extremely responsive to touch and physiotherapy techniques. Many would have had physio or regular massage whilst racing, and are normally happy to have any part of their body touched or handled. When taking the photos for this article, Rosie had laid down before I'd even asked her, and within seconds closed her eyes while I gently palpated her.

Finding a physiotherapist:

There are many different practitioners available, if you are looking for a physiotherapist, ensure they are a qualified physiotherapist. If you would like to find a qualified animal physiotherapist in your area please email me and as I have a list of qualified animal/veterinary therapists in NZ. ■