

# HOME AFTER FHO

(LOGAN'S STORY)





Our dog Logan, an English Setter/Golden Retriever mix, was six months old when he had bilateral FHO surgery. We had no idea what to expect once we brought him home. I searched high and low on the internet for some article or web site that might give us a hint what it would be like, and I found nothing. There was plenty of information about the surgery itself, but absolutely zero about what to truly expect once you brought your dog home. So I decided that once we got through this I would write a short article describing our experience with Logan as he recuperated. Other than neutering or tooth extraction, we had no experience with surgery for a dog. So we were about to embark on what I can now call, in hindsight, an incredible learning experience and an adventure. Where this adventure would take us I didn't know at the time, but we were determined to do our best to give Logan the love and care he needed to get through this part of his life and get on with living pain free.

So on the following few pages I will tell you about our experiences with Logan's homecoming and recovery. Bear with me. I am not a professional writer and what I write will probably more often come from the heart rather than from a literary background for sure. This article has nothing whatsoever to do with the actual medical aspect of the surgery, only what we experienced once we brought Logan home.

It is probably not necessary to say this, but I will anyway. Every dog is different: in size, pre-surgery health condition, age, pain tolerance, disposition. I can only relate our experience with Logan. Your dog's experience may be totally different. As it was described to us the day we picked up Logan to come home, a dog who has had bilateral FHO surgery now has thigh bones that are free-floating in the hind legs and no longer connected to anything. So just picture yourself with that condition and how you would have to deal with getting around. That one sentence more than anything else helped me to really "see" what Logan would be coping with. It helps greatly to understand what your dog is going through and how strange and confusing your dog's world has suddenly become because they don't understand why they hurt or what has happened, and there's no way you can explain it to them.



First, here are some of the suggestions that were offered to us or I picked up along the way. Some, all, or none may apply. They are exactly that, suggestions.

1. If you have exposed hardwood, tile, or linoleum floors it really is essential that you put down non-skid runners or rubber backed mats, continuous or as “stepping stones.” Your dog will not have traction with or control of his hind legs and will easily slip, slide, and fall. This slipping and sliding could result in other injuries that are totally unnecessary if you take this simple precaution.
2. Wherever your dog slept pre-surgery doesn’t matter at this point. What he will need now is a comfortable floor-level sleeping place in his normal location, but also one where he can see and be part of the family. He will not be up and around much at first. In our case this lasted three to four weeks. If you have one, crating is a good thing the first few days until you get a feel for your dog’s physical condition. We do not have young children and ours is a reasonably quiet household, so crating was not necessary. We used two comfy cushioned dog beds. The reason I suggest two sleeping places is because there were many times Logan chose the quiet, private bed away from the rest of the house. Other times he wanted to be part of the routine and he chose the bed in the living room so he could see what was going on. Early on, he spent a lot of time in the quiet area. As he began to feel better, obviously he chose to be part of the household routine.
3. If you have another dog or dogs at home, try to arrange a quiet homecoming. Your dog has just had an extended hospital stay and a major surgery. Not only is he uncomfortable due to his incision(s), but he’s tired and most likely hurts. His hind legs don’t work well at all. He does not understand why and very likely is scared as well.
4. We used a crate for the ride home (1-1/2 hrs. for us) and lifted the crate down out of the car, carried it with Logan in it to the back yard, and allowed Logan to get out on his own and relieve himself. We then brought him in the house in the crate for his reunion with our other dog. Once the excitement settled down, we opened the crate and let Logan out. He went immediately to the water bowl and then to his bed we’d set up in the living room. He slept very soundly for almost two hours.

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5. If you have a two-story house, plan on your dog remaining on the first level for the several weeks after homecoming. It might be a good idea to plan on confining your dog to a smaller area than the entire first floor for at least the first few days until you size up what he can and can't do. Give some thought to confining to one or two rooms, but rooms where he can be part of the household and not feel excluded. The whole purpose is to make your dog feel like everything is still the same in his life, but to restrict his area of activity until you are certain what he can and can't do.
  6. Steps and large dogs. If you have this combination in your situation, please give a lot of thought to how you will handle it when you get home. Go through this thought process before you bring your dog home. Doesn't matter if it's three steps or ten, somehow you need to get your dog up and down those steps when nature calls. This is definitely not easy when you're trying to find the way, number one, to lift without hurting either yourself or your dog, and in finding the right combination of grasp on your dog. You will find your dog will easily tip forward toward the head when you're trying to figure out this maneuver. He is "top heavy" due to his unwillingness to put weight on his hind legs. A pet ramp may be a solution depending on your steps. A strong male around is a good thing. Using a towel under the rib cage with a firm grip on the towel does work, but trust me when I say it's very cumbersome. The dog doesn't like it, and neither did I. It can easily slip out of place because you're new at this and so is the dog. The first week Logan seemed to have incredible holding power as far as relieving himself, but it still meant dealing with the steps three times a day at first.

### **Our First Two Weeks At Home:**

Logan ate his first meal at home eagerly and actually hobbled/walked to his normal feeding spot. That was the last time he stood and ate in that location for the next four weeks. That was the last time he ate a full meal eagerly for the next four to eight weeks. Pre-surgery Logan's whole life evolved around mealtime, so when he would not eat it made it oh so clear to me just how awful he really felt. Of course, it is very possible his pain medication and antibiotic also affected his appetite. In Logan's case, number one, he was not able to stand and eat. He obviously was not comfortable sitting or laying down to eat because that's not how dogs eat. Therefore, I think he just chose not to eat. I found myself at mealtime taking his food to where he was and coaxing, pleading,



begging him to eat, sitting down next to him and hand feeding him, whatever I had to do to get some nutrition in him. He was probably eating about one-quarter of his pre-surgery food volume during the first week, and it did not improve a whole lot over the next several weeks.

At first it will be very awkward for your dog to eat from a food bowl on the floor while standing. Logan tipped face forward and fell two or three times trying this. Then we tried raising his food bowl up. This was strange to him and he turned away. Eventually, as stated above, we found what worked, and that was eating while laying down temporarily.

Logan slept, slept, slept, and then slept some more during his first week at home. In fact, he only got up three times a day to go out and relieve himself. I actually found myself taking water to him just in case he wanted a drink and could not get up. At one point I called the vet and described his demeanor as the only way I could describe it, severely depressed. It was agreed he very likely was a little depressed. He's a puppy and he cannot do the things puppies would like to do. I was beginning to get depressed myself over this whole situation, thinking Logan will never walk normally again, will never be a puppy again.

Going outside when nature calls is definitely an experience the first two weeks. It did not occur in our case, but don't be one bit surprised if there are in-house accidents. Our experience went something like this. Logan would start to fidget and kind of talk to us anywhere from a half hour to two hours before he would actually get up to go to the back door. It was as though he knew he needed help and would pause and sit while I opened the door. With some hesitation he would then push himself up from the sitting position and head outside. Getting down that door jamb step was relatively easy for him. Then he would walk across the deck and sit again at the top of the steps waiting for me to do something to help him get down the steps. This was the point at which I would wait for him to stand again, and then stand at his side, bend down and put my arms around his rib cage to lightly lift his hind end as he utilized his front legs to go down the steps. (We only have three steps to the ground and going down is easy compared to going up.)

Usually within two feet of the steps Logan would semi-squat the best he could handle it and urinate like there was no tomorrow! Having no control actually during the squat, sometimes almost falling over, there were many times he just peed all over his front legs



due to his position. I could tell this upset him greatly, and I would just pet him and soothe him verbally the best I could. But for the bowel movement he insisted on going to the far side of the yard, in our case about 75 feet away. So I would walk with him, along side of him in case he needed propping up along the way. Once his business was accomplished, Logan would walk a few steps and slump down to the ground. There was no getting him up no matter what until he was ready to make that effort to get up and come in. Could be ten minutes, half-hour. Could be pouring rain, could be snowing, or freezing cold. Didn't matter. Until he was ready to tackle that difficult rise from a down position and that short walk back to the deck, he wasn't budging. Once back to the deck steps, then there would be the fumble-bumble of figuring out which was the best way to grasp him and help him up the steps. I honestly don't think I ever did it the same way twice.

Our veterinarian had told us how important it was for Logan to be up and moving, moving, moving. The sooner, the better. However, with those instructions on my mind, I still pretty much allowed Logan to just plain rest the first four or five days at home. I didn't push him in one direction or the other, just took his lead and praised him when he would get up and moving by himself around the house without encouragement from me. And when I say moving, during those first few days at home moving meant a few feet and flopping down, moving meant going from one room to the next and flopping down in the bed for a two-hour rest. I don't know what I expected when Logan came home, but I did not expect him to sleep the way he did.

By the time the second week post-surgery began I knew I had to do what was best for Logan, and that was get him up and truly moving just as we had been told to do. First, we began taking short walks around the yard perimeter on the leash at first. I used the leash because the leash meant fun things to Logan, and he would get excited about it and show some interest in walking. After the first day of walking the yard perimeter about five different times throughout the day, the following day we went out the gate and to the corner and back. That was the extent of our walks for the next couple days, three to four times a day. And then we just gradually extended the walks each day, always keeping in mind that we had to make it back as well.

By the end of the second week at home after one of our walks we came into the back yard and approached the deck steps. Logan just suddenly bunny hopped up the steps himself. To be honest, I think he probably knew that I was going to drop him on his head sooner or later if he didn't learn to get up the steps by himself! I cannot even explain how wonderful it was to see him hop up those steps on his own. I think it might have



been a turning point in helping him have confidence in himself and helping us to feel like just maybe Logan was going to be okay. Three small steps for Logan, one big giant stepping stone to post-FHO recovery!

There were still times Logan would stand at the bottom of the steps getting himself ready to come up the steps, and he would sort of tilt forward and end up with his chin resting on the deck itself. It would take him a little time to recover from that position and hop up the steps, but the best part of all was he did it himself, without help from any of us.

During this early time post surgery Logan had an incredible arching of the spine, and I often wondered what kind of long-term effects this may have on the spine structure. This arching occurs because of unwillingness to place weight on the rear end due to the surgery. During this time also I was noticing a bowing of the front legs occurring because so much weight was placed forward on the body.

We were very fortunate to have a close family friend who came to visit Logan several times during his first two weeks at home. She performed Reiki on Logan, an ancient Japanese healing technique (see [www.Reiki.org](http://www.Reiki.org)). I'm not really certain how it works, but each time we would see such a difference in Logan for the rest of the day in how relaxed he was and how well he rested. I'm not recommending that you seek out someone to do this. I'm just relating it as part of our first few weeks at home with Logan.

### **Summary of Week 3 through Week 12:**

We were taking three to four short walks a day, and it seemed in no time at all Logan didn't want to stop at the corner and he continued on. Of course, I was always mindful of the fact we had to go back the same distance we'd already walked. It was a learning experience, those early walks. Be patient because there's lots of sitting and laying down episodes. I wasn't able to pick Logan up from a laying down position, so I just had to stand next to him and wait until he was ready to get up and go again. You'll find it's not necessarily the legs that hurt, but the stress on the back (the rounding of the back caused by leaning the body weight forward to take pressure off the hips) that tires your dog. The sitting or laying down is to relax the spine and take the pressure off of it.

Logan looked forward to those walks no matter how much he hurt or how tired he seemed. I also knew he would sleep in total exhaustion once we returned home. The longer our walks became the more concerned I was about his lack of appetite. I had



hoped the walks would perk up his appetite, but that problem did continue. I found myself literally sitting on the floor next to Logan and feeding him bits of food by hand, sometimes for fifteen or twenty minutes, small amounts at a time, just to get him to eat a half-cup of food. I tried all sorts of tricks to encourage him to eat.

At some point late during week two or early during week three I was pleasantly surprised when Logan actually sought me out to tell me he had to go outside. I think that day was his turning point. It was that moment that helped me to truly know he really was making progress, that I was the one who just had to be patient and allow his body and his spirit to heal.

Throughout the next month every three days I would add a little distance to our walks. First it was just around the block, and not a large block at that. Then we progressed to a block and a half, two blocks. I would say somewhere around week six or so we were walking a distance without sitting down or laying down. Once that occurred, I knew we could really add on the distance. At approximately week 12 Logan was walking a distance of 1-1/2 miles once a day as though nothing ever happened to him with shorter walks in the evening. He might tire just a little on the way home, perhaps sit one time now and then. In the evenings we would put a harness on him, attach a wagon to the harness with about eight pounds of weight at first, and walk around the block. Early on this tired him out a lot and he would stop to rest frequently. After a few days of pulling this weight, it was like he wasn't pulling anything behind him at all. We added weight gradually and continued this exercise for another six weeks or so. Logan was the talk of our neighborhood, and everyone would come out to check on his progress at some time or another.

As the warmer weather arrived I tried my best to interest Logan in the suggested water therapy as we live near the beach. What I found out about Logan was that he detests anything related to water (especially baths), and I just decided not to press the issue with him. However, Logan did finally begin to show an interest in chasing after a ball once he found out he could do it pain-free, so we began a nightly session of that as a form of therapeutic exercise. With the warmer weather Logan now spends hours outside running, jumping, trying to catch squirrels, birds, butterflies. You name it, he runs after it and jumps up to catch it, all great exercise!



Approximately week 8 Logan's appetite returned with a bang, and there's been no looking back. The lack of appetite lasted a lot longer than I ever expected, and we were greatly relieved when he showed a normal interest in food again.

### **The Present:**

As I wind up this article, it has now been almost five months since Logan's surgery. Logan romps around the back yard with our other dog, Colby, wrestles and plays almost like nothing ever happened. When it gets too rough, he drops and rolls and protects himself, but for the most part he jumps right back up and joins in again. He chases squirrels and birds with a speed I never thought I'd see with him. He runs and jumps up in the air trying to catch the elusive butterflies, and seeing him go through this exercise several times a day just makes you smile. He has perfected running after a ball and bringing it back, something he's a little late in learning but tackling it with gusto! He jumps up on furniture for the first time in his life, pretty much a no-no in our house, but I still love to see him do it. So now he's learning the word "off." At almost eleven months old the puppy in Logan is now coming forth in leaps and bounds, and it's a wonderful sight to see. The curvature in the spine is almost non-existent at this point. Although his front legs still have a slight bow to them, that bowing has decreased to about half what it was even a month ago. That means Logan is more and more distributing his body weight as it should be rather than all forward and away from the hips.

Would I do this again with another dog at another time? You bet I would! It's worth every penny, every heartache, every worry, and all the hard work and time involved with the daily therapeutic exercise. The recuperation time flew by and today we have a wonderfully spirited, happy, pain-free puppy and life is grand!

I am not certain just how far this article may travel. I will be sharing it with Logan's vet, and a few rescue sites on the internet. I am happy to try to answer any questions or concerns raised by anyone who may read this in this future, and I would be happy to know if this article was of any help to you. My intent is only to share our experience with Logan's FHO surgery and hopefully help anyone who is considering this surgery for their dog. You may email me at [cbryson602@aol.com](mailto:cbryson602@aol.com). Please use the subject "Logan's FHO" and I will be happy to open and read your email.