FORMULATION OF A REHABILITATION PLAN  
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**Key Points**
- Rehabilitation requires a team approach
- Therapy is based on the structure involved and stage of the injury or healing
- Must consider your expertise and facilities when formulation a plan
- Outcome goals and re-evaluation are critical

It is important to realize that this is a team approach. The team may consist of the veterinarian, physical therapist, owner, as well as other professionals (trainers, farriers, etc.). All members of the team should be involved in all aspects of the treatment to insure the best possible outcome.

There are several things one must look at while developing a rehabilitation program for an individual. The first is to have an idea as to what your success has been with patients with a similar condition and how have they progressed during the treatment period? The second is to establish outcome goals. Where should this patient be at during a certain time in the rehabilitation process? Third, you should determine your capabilities and the resources or facilities you have available. If a specific modality is indicated that you do not have it then the patient should be referred. Fourth, you should assess the patient. What is the nature of the injury? What type of therapy or surgery has been done? How amenable is the patient to therapy? What are the owner’s expectations? Lastly you should develop a plan specifically for that patient based on the answers to the above questions.

Any plan that you develop will depend on the stage of the injury. The initial stage is from the time of injury or surgery until all inflammation has resolved. This may be as short as a few days to as long as 3-4 weeks. The goal being decreasing inflammation, preserve range of motion and to prevent muscle atrophy. Typically, cold therapy, supportive wraps and passive motion is utilized in this period.

The second stage begins as inflammation is resolving. The goal of this stage is to gradually increase the stress being placed on the healing tissues. This aids in preventing or revising scar tissue. Therapies that could be considered include therapeutic exercise, therapeutic ultrasound, shockwave, as well as electrical modalities.

The choice of which modality to use in which stage is dependent upon one’s experience and what you are trying to accomplish. For instance, laser therapy may be used in Stage 1 to help relieve tissue edema and in stage 2 to help in epithelial migration during wound healing.

Many times we focus on the injury and neglect the rest of the patient. We often have success in treating the injury, but lose use of the horse to contra-lateral limb problems such as laminitis; break down of supporting structures and angular limb problems (in the case of foals and weanlings). Providing a high plane of nutrition, a good environment and support to the other limbs are as important as the treatment of the injury. One should also not neglect the mental status of the horse. Having a companion in the barn (pony, another horse or goat), as well as play toys will go a long way in keeping the patient happy.
It is no longer appropriate to make a blanket recommendation of 30 days in a stall, 30 days in a paddock and 30 – 60 days turned out to pasture. Physiotherapy in human is common place and in most cases is part of the standard of care. Many of the same modalities used in humans can be applied to the horse. Utilization of the appropriate modality will aid in achieving a more successful outcome over rest alone.


