

Fundamentals of Restraint

Reading Assignment: Tasks for the Veterinary Assistant, pages 115-118

Restraint involves limiting the movement of a patient so a medical procedure can be performed. The veterinary assistant will often restrain the patient to increase the ability of the veterinarian and/or technician in completing vital procedures. A calm, rational, self-assured demeanor is required for all members of the staff, as the patient's conduct would be influenced by the attitudes of the handlers. The handler's body language, tone of voice, mental state, eye contact, and physical movements can influence the patient's behavior greatly. In order to adhere to this standard, the veterinary assistant must be well trained and skilled in the art of restraint. Animal patients can harm handlers, and the handler can likewise harm the patient if they are not careful and sufficiently trained.

There are three major types of restraint:

- **Psychological** – this is the least restrictive type of restraint and would be used in combination with other types of restraint. Using a soft, soothing voice while gently stroking the patient will help calm and sooth them.
- **Physical** – this is the primary method of restraining an animal and involves using the handler's hands or body along with muzzles, ropes or other equipment.
- **Chemical** – this method utilizes drugs such as sedatives, tranquilizers and anesthesia to alter the patient's mental state, allowing the animal to stay immobilized and/or without pain, and causing the patient to be cooperative during procedures. Chemical restraint would be used if the patient is particularly difficult to handle, if the patient is in pain, or if the procedure requires stringent stillness such as surgical procedures. The veterinarian will decipher whether or not the patient requires chemical restraint, and will also determine the type, dosage and route of administration of drug.

All forms of restraint will be covered in detail throughout the stage.

To determine which type of restraint is required, the following factors are evaluated and taken into account by the veterinarian and followed through by the technician or veterinary assistant:

- **Behavior** – the patient’s behavior relies on several determining factors.
 - **Species** – is the patient a dog, cat, hamster? There are different methods of restraint for different species. In addition, smaller animals such as rodents can easily be harmed if restraint is not tailored to their sensitive statures. Larger animals can injure the handler.
 - **Breed** – not all dogs are alike; for example, a miniature pinscher will act and react differently than a German shepherd and would have to be restrained accordingly. Larger breeds will require greater strength and smaller breeds will call for care that is more sensitive.
 - **Sex** –spayed or neutered animals are commonly calmer than those who are still intact. In addition, intact animals are often more territorial and protective of their owners.
 - **Age** – older animals will require more tedious care as they are more fragile and in greater risk of being injured. Similarly, animals of very young age can be easily injured if restrained improperly.
 - **Territory** – an animal is commonly uncomfortable when not familiar with the surroundings. As these procedures will usually occur within the clinic and not at the animal’s home, this needs to be taken into account.
 - **Hierarchal position** – pack animals (dogs) commonly operate according to their position within the pack. Is the dog the alpha of the “pack” or family, or the beta (lower member) of the pack? Most professionals would agree that an alpha dog is more likely to show aggression.
 - *NOTE: This is a controversial subject among professionals today. Some researchers and practitioners reject this theory as outdated and invalid while others maintain that the hierarchal structure is well founded and legitimate.*
 - **Prior experience** – if the patient has had negative experiences with veterinary examinations and procedures, they are more likely to be nervous and difficult to handle. If the patient has never been to the vet, they may also be anxious.
 - **Current health** – why is the patient undergoing the procedure? If the patient has sustained an injury, they may be in shock and delirious. The patient may bite the nearest person, even the owner, if in pain. A routine

procedure performed on a healthy animal should require less restraint, but this is not always true, especially when trimming nails.

- **Procedure** – the type of procedure being performed will also dictate what type of restraint is required.
 - **Pain level** – what level of pain is the patient experiencing pre-procedure? Have they been in pain for a long duration of time, or is the pain present due to an acute injury?
 - **Duration** – the length of the procedure helps to determine what type of restraint would be needed. Surgical procedures require chemical restraint while a vaccination may only require minimal physical restraint.
 - **Body location** – if the site of the injury is close to an easily damaged structure such as the patient's eye, chemical restraint may be necessary as a simple slip could permanently damage the patient. Conversely, if the site is not located in an area easily prone to injury, physical restraint should suffice.
 - **Degree of immobility required** – surgical procedures will call for the patient to be fully immobilized. Complete immobilization usually requires some level of chemical restraint. Other less serious or routine procedures may not require complete immobility.

- **Handler** – is the technician or veterinary assistant responsible for restraining the animal?
 - **Level of expertise** – the level of training of the handler will dictate what types of restraint are possible. Someone who is untrained in restraint should not be expected to perform certain methods of restraint; an expert's skills are far less limited.
 - **Physical strength** – can the handler lift the patient's weight? Veterinary staff members should not lift or carry a patient weighing more than 40 lbs by themselves
 - **Availability** – some methods of restraint may require more than one handler. The more skilled the handler(s), the more options the staff has in regards to methods of restraint.



Important Note



Unless the veterinarian specifically authorizes the owner to do so, do not allow the owner to restrain their own pet. If an owner sustains an injury inflicted by their own pet, the veterinary hospital is legally responsible for this injury.

- **Available equipment** – many restraint methods require the use of certain tools and equipment.
 - Ropes and leashes
 - Towels and cat sacks
 - Leather gloves
 - Cages and carriers
 - Commercial muzzles
 - Gauze muzzles
 - Quick release pole
 - Panels, barriers, and squeeze cages

The veterinarian will ultimately decide what type(s) of restraint are required for each individual patient. The skill level of the veterinary assistant will help determine which types are possible. Having a comprehensive knowledge of all types of animal restraint will help the veterinary hospital or practice immensely.