

PREVENTING & TREATING CANCER IN PETS



Cancer is the leading cause of death in older dogs and cats, responsible for almost 50 percent of the deaths of pets older than age 10, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. Although most cancers are found in older pets, some types frequently affect younger animals. No matter what your pet's age, knowing a little about cancer in pets is important. The good news is, many cancers can be prevented and many more can be cured or treated effectively.

PET INSURANCE

Would you be able to afford \$8000 for spinal tumor surgery or \$10,000 for radiation treatment if your pet needed it? Most of our clients would struggle to pay for something this costly. It's heartbreaking to have to decline needed care due to costs, especially if the prognosis is good and the pet would make a full recovery if the money was available.

Pet insurance is the smart thing to have, so you don't have to make medical decisions based on cost alone. Most plans reimburse 90% of your medical costs for new conditions. You may even be able to find stand-alone cancer coverage for dogs and cats, to provide economical coverage options for the costliest medical condition of pets. This would cover diagnosis and treatment of malignant cancers, including chemotherapy, MRIs, exams, blood tests, surgeries, medications and other cancer-related expenses.

We highly recommend purchasing pet health insurance.

We can only treat your pet's cancer if you can afford it. A CT and radiation treatment, for example, costs over \$10,000. Once your pet has pre-existing conditions, treatment will not be covered, so the time to think about it is now.

PREVENTING CANCER

1) Have your pets spayed or neutered. 75% of unspayed female dogs and cats will develop mammary tumors (breast cancer) as they get older. Spaying a pet before her first heat almost completely eliminates this risk.

Unneutered male dogs are prone to testicular, perianal and prostate tumors. Two

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thirds of unneutered older male dogs develop prostate disease, often leading to prostate cancer. Neutering your male dog while he is young, or as soon as he is retired from breeding, prevents many problems.

About 60% of unspayed female rabbits die of uterine cancer by age six. Spaying and neutering are recommended for rabbits, ferrets and guinea pigs, as well as dogs and cats.

2) Feed your pet a high quality diet, rich in antioxidants and Omega 3 fatty acids. These nutrients help protect cells from age-related deterioration, thus reducing the risk of cancer arising from damaged cells. They also reduce problems from allergies, arthritis and other inflammatory diseases.

Fatty acid content is not listed on pet food labels. Most over-the-counter diets contain very little of the Omega 3 fatty acids EPA and DHA. Only a few prescription diets contain therapeutic amounts. Most pets could benefit from much higher amounts than are included in their regular food. See our handouts *Foods We Recommend* for diet recommendations and *Supplement Recommendations* for fatty acid dosages.

3) Don't smoke. Lymphoma is a common cancer of cats and is twice as likely to occur in cats living in a house with a person who smokes. Two smokers in the household means a fourfold increase in risk for your cat. Cigarette smoke is heavier than air, so pets, who spend most of their time lower to the ground, are more at risk. Cats not only inhale the smoke, but when grooming themselves, they lick and swallow ash and smoke particles that settle onto their fur. Lymphoma usually occurs in the respiratory or digestive systems, where exposure to the toxins in cigarette smoke is the greatest. Smoking is not only dangerous to you but to your pets as well!

4) Keep your pet at a healthy weight. Purina's longevity study showed a two year longer life expectancy for dogs that were kept a little lean, whereas overweight pets developed arthritis and cancer much sooner. Being overweight greatly increases risk for cancer.

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5) Keep pink-skinned dogs and cats out of the sun. White cats are especially prone to getting skin cancer on their ears or nose from sunburn.

6) Have lumps and bumps checked with a biopsy. This is often as simple as putting a needle into a lump to get a few cells to examine under the microscope. This usually can tell us if a lump needs to be removed. Roughly 50% of cancer cases are cured by surgery to remove the lump. Check for lumps and bumps and report any that you find right away.

7) Test cats for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FeLV and FIV). These viruses can cause cancer. All cats should be tested upon adoption or with any serious illness. If your cat goes outdoors you should vaccinate for FeLV and retested annually.

8) Use up-to-date vaccination protocols for cats. Cats can get cancerous tumors at the sites of vaccine injections. The safer vaccines and rotating vaccine schedule we use was designed to minimize risk for these tumors.

9) Reduce exposure to chemicals and toxins. Flea collars are associated with oral cancer in cats. Lawn chemicals increase bladder cancer risk for dogs. Other examples of cancer-causing chemicals include fire retardant chemicals in fabric, carpeting and upholstery; non-food-grade plastics in toys and bowls; and engine exhaust.

10) Look for it. NOT ALL CANCERS ARE OBVIOUS EXTERIOR LUMPS. The earlier a tumor is detected, the better the chance of a cure. Don't wait until your pet gets sick. Have your pet examined yearly if it is young, twice a year if over age 9.

We recommend regular blood and urine screening for all pets, in part because some types of cancer will cause abnormalities in these tests. Have X-rays taken of the chest and abdomen each year in pets twelve years of age and older, to catch changes in the lungs, liver, spleen or other organs.

Call us if you notice blood in the stool or urine, a persistent cough or hoarseness, difficulty swallowing or chewing or any other change or symptom.

HERE ARE THE WARNING SIGNS OF CANCER:

1) Change of bowel or bladder habits. Diarrhea or constipation, straining to urinate or defecate, blood or mucous in the stool or urine. Chronic vomiting is also a red flag. Vomiting hairballs more than a few times a year is not normal and should never be ignored.

Chronic vomiting with weight loss often means intestinal cancer in cats. This is a highly treatable cancer if caught early.

2) A lump or sore that does not heal. Some skin cancers don't appear as lumps, but as raw, bleeding or scabby areas. This is especially common in cats.



3) Unusual bleeding or discharge. Bleeding from the mouth, ears, or nose may signal a tumor inside.

4) Drooling or difficulty swallowing. These symptoms are very common with tumors in the mouth or throat, such as the one at right.



5) Changes in respiration. Nagging cough, hoarseness, tiring easily, rapid breathing and excessive panting are signs of heart and lung disease, including cancer.

6) Abdominal distension or filling. A mass in the abdominal cavity may make your pet appear to be bloated or to have gained weight. This is especially worrisome if your pet looks thin otherwise.

7) Unexplained weight loss.

8) Changes in behavior, temperament, activity level or habits.

All these signs can be symptoms of other diseases as well. Call us right away if you notice any changes in your pet.

HEMANGIOMA & HEMANGIOSARCOMA are tumors that arise from blood vessels.

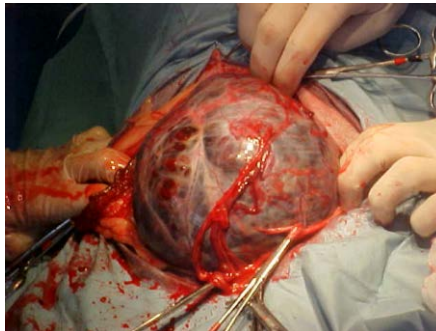
Hemangioma is the benign form, hemangiosarcoma is the cancerous kind. They arise most commonly on the spleen and are common in older, large breed dogs.

If the tumor is benign (non-cancerous), removing the spleen cures the disease – if we can catch it before it ruptures, which can cause the pet to bleed to death. If we catch these tumors when they are small, like in the 1st picture below, the prognosis is much better, and the surgery expense is much less.

Regular examinations to palpate the abdomen, testing to look for abnormal red blood cells caused by the tumor, and x-ray or ultrasound screening, can all help us to catch the problem early. Another thing you can do at home is to always keep an eye on the color of your pet's gums. If they look pale, instead of a healthy pink color, the dog may be bleeding internally. Other symptoms would be an enlarged abdomen, weakness, collapse, or poor appetite.

To watch our video on this disease, follow this link

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HBPwYG5CW4>



The splenic tumor on the left is small, with little risk of rupturing. The one on the right weighs several pounds and has already caused intermittent abdominal bleeding.

TREATING CANCER

Better pet health care, better nutrition and the indoor lifestyles led by most pets nowadays means more pets are living longer. Since cancer is primarily a disease of old age and more pets are seniors, veterinarians are seeing many more cases than in the past. The good news is we have effective treatments for a great many cancers nowadays.

While 50% of dogs and 30-35% of cats will develop cancer, it is certainly not an automatic death sentence. The most common types of cancer in dogs are tumors within or just beneath the skin, where they usually can be surgically removed. Happily,

Why do we treat cancer in pets? Well, we treat it because we can. Many diseases that veterinarians treat cannot be cured, including diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease. Yet we treat these disorders without question. Why should cancer be any different?

50% of cancer cases are cured by surgery alone.

For other pets, chemotherapy or radiation may be possible. A common cancer of cats is low-grade intestinal lymphoma, which is treated with a simple chemotherapy regimen of oral medication at home. Pets usually tolerate chemotherapy better than humans. Hair loss, nausea and diarrhea are rare, so quality of life is generally very good throughout treatment.

The first trick to treating cancer is to identify the enemy. There are dozens of kinds of cancer and each responds to different treatments. Once the cancer is identified, a plan can be made to treat it. The prognosis, costs, risks and benefits of a particular type of cancer and its treatment are discussed with the pet owner and a plan is then formulated to treat the disease.

You may be thinking, "Why would anyone treat cancer in a pet? Isn't radiation or chemo for an animal a little over the top?" Well, we treat it because we can. Many diseases that veterinarians treat cannot be cured, including diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease. Yet we treat these disorders without question. Why should cancer be any different?

Even in cases where a cure is unlikely, with treatment we can often extend lifespan, while preserving an excellent quality of life.

Millions of pets in the U.S. have been treated for cancer. In fact, oncology (the treatment of cancer) is the fastest growing veterinary specialty.

Veterinary oncologists are available in the Milwaukee area to provide expertise and recommendations to you and your regular veterinarian. You may be referred to see a specialist close by or at the veterinary school in Madison.

If your pet develops cancer, we will carefully discuss the diagnosis and the treatment options with you so that together you can plan the best treatment for your situation.

As always, we want to stress that good pet care requires a team effort from the owner and family members who care for the pet every day, and our staff. PLEASE CALL US REGARDING ANY PROBLEM WITH YOUR PET!

Cancer is very common in pets and it is often very treatable. We will carefully discuss the diagnosis and the treatment options with you so that together we can plan the best treatment for your situation.