

HORIZONS - a resource guide to active & mature living

April 3, 2008

Cancer in Cats and Dogs

Your pet's cancer diagnosis can be a frightening, but it doesn't necessarily have to be. Tremendous strides in the early detection and treatment of cancer have taken place over the years which can allow your pet to live a longer, happy life with you.

What is Cancer?

Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of cells on or within the body. Cancer can occur at any age, but is much more common in older cats and dogs. It is the leading cause of death in senior dogs and cats, just as it is in senior humans. Dogs get cancer at roughly the same rate as humans, although cats get fewer cancers. Cancer may be localized or it may invade adjacent tissue and spread throughout any organ of your pet's body. The symptoms can vary dependent upon the organs involved.

How is Cancer Detected?

Lumps may be found when you are petting your cat or dog, or may be detected by your primary care veterinarian or specialist during an examination. There are no specific blood tests for cancer in dogs and cats, although changes suggestive of cancer may show up on blood tests. Your primary care veterinarian may suggest that your pet see one of the specialists at Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson for further workup or additional information. A veterinary specialist may perform more advanced testing, x-rays, biopsy, ultrasound or computerized tomography (CAT scan) to confirm and/or treat your pet's cancer.

What Are The Common Signs and Symptoms of Cancer in Dogs and Cats?

1. Abnormal swellings, lumps or masses that persist or continue to grow
2. Sores that do not heal
3. Unexplained bleeding or discharge from any bodily opening
4. Refusing to eat or loss of appetite
5. Difficulty eating, swallowing, persistent drooling
6. Difficulty breathing, persistent coughing, hoarseness
7. Changes in respiration, panting, rapid breathing
8. Rapid weight loss, abdominal distension
9. Rapid weight gain, bloated abdomen
10. Offensive breath or body odor
11. Persistent lameness or stiffness
12. Hesitation to exercise, loss of stamina
13. Changes in personality

14. Changes in bowel or bladder habits
15. Difficulty urinating or defecating

Please note that the common signs and symptoms of cancer can be symptoms of other diseases as well.

How is Cancer Treated?

You may be familiar with some of the cancer treatment options that may be offered to your pet; because they are basically the same cancer treatments humans receive. Dependent upon your pet's type of cancer, treatment may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, cryosurgery, heat or immunotherapy. Once you have the correct cancer diagnosis for your pet, your family veterinarian or specialist will discuss the best treatment option(s) for your pet.

What Should I Do If I Think My Pet Has Cancer?

Contact your family veterinarian or one of the specialists at Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson immediately. Rapid, effective treatment can result in your pet's increased comfort and a longer and happier life with you!

Resources for More Information

Veterinary Specialty Center of Tucson

4909 North La Canada Drive
Tucson, Arizona 85704
520-795-9955
www.vscot.com

American Veterinary Medical Association

www.avma.org

American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine

www.acvim.org

Veterinary Cancer Society

www.vetcancersociety.org

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