

## Cancer in Dogs

### Canine Cancer Facts

FACT: Cancer is the leading cause of non-accidental death in dogs.

FACT: Lymphoma is the leading cancer diagnosed in dogs.

FACT: Nearly 50% of pets over the age of 10 will develop some type of cancer.

FACT: The increasing incidence of cancer in dogs is due to longer life spans.



### What is cancer?

Cancer is a single word that encompasses many different types of diseases. Each of these diseases is attributed to the purposeless and uncontrolled growth of cells on or within the body. They are either localized to one part of the body as a visible mass (tumor) or spread throughout (metastasis). Cancer can develop in or from any tissue in the body. Cancer is common in the dog or cat and the rate increases with age. Dogs get cancer at roughly the same rate as humans, while cats get fewer cancers. In one survey, cancer accounted for almost half the deaths of those pets over 10 years of age. There are many different types of cancer, each type named according to the tissue (or part of the body) that it originated. Some cancers have the ability to metastasize (spread) to other parts of the body. Other terms for cancer are malignancy and neoplasia.

### What causes canine cancer?

No one seems to know for sure what causes cancer in our furry friends. Some theories include pesticides, preservatives and fillers used in dog foods; second hand smoke; vaccinations; chronic ehrlichiosis etc. Unfortunately, these are only theories, and have yet to be proven. Since the cause of cancer is not known, prevention is difficult. The exception is breast cancer, which is largely preventable with early spaying.

### Are there any warning signs to watch for?

Yes, there are some common warning signs to watch for. Listed below are warning signs that your pet could be experiencing a serious health problem. If your pet should display any of these symptoms, it is recommended you have your pet thoroughly examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible. Successful treatment depends on how early the cancer is detected.

- Abnormal swelling that persists or continues to grow.
- Swollen glands.
- Unusual lumps or masses anywhere on the body.
- Sores that do not heal.
- Unexplained weight loss.
- Loss of appetite.
- Bleeding or discharge from a body opening (mouth, nose, etc).

- Offensive odor (especially from mouth, but also from body, extremities, etc).
- Difficulty eating or swallowing.
- Hesitation to play or exercise.
- Loss of stamina.
- Lethargy.
- Changes in behavior and/or attitude.
- Persistent stiffness or lameness.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Difficulty urinating or defecating.

#### **Are there any cures for cancer?**

Some say cancer can be cured, while others say it cannot. This sounds quite vague, but it really is a matter of one's definition of the word "cure." Just as in human cancer, there are no guaranteed cures for canine cancer. There are treatments such as surgery to remove a mass, lump, or affected area; radiation to kill cancer cells in a specific area; and chemotherapy to try to kill existing cancer cells and to prevent new cancer cells from developing. These are not cures, but rather, they are treatments to slow the progression of cancer from spreading to other areas in the body.

#### **What options do I have in treating cancer?**

Traditionally, there are three main treatment options: surgery, medication and/or radiation. Depending upon the type of cancer, the stage of the cancer, and the cancer's location, your veterinarian or oncologist could recommend one, two or all three treatments for your pet. In some instances however, treatment may not be an option at all.

#### **Are there holistic or alternative medicine treatments for cancer?**

There are many who believe that holistic and alternative medicine can be used to treat cancer, without the use of traditional medicine. Others believe that holistic and alternative medicine can or should be used together with traditional medicine to provide a more balanced treatment plan in fighting cancer. And still others don't believe that holistic and alternative medicine has any merit at all. The decision to use or not to use holistic and alternative medicine, whether in whole or in part, is purely that of a personal choice.