

Coping With Cancer

- Cancer is extremely common in pets.
- Cancer can be successfully managed in many cases.
- Most pets tolerate treatment extremely well.
- An accurate diagnosis and proper staging of a pet's cancer are essential in order to pursue the best treatment and achieve the best possible outcome.
- Cancer treatment in pets is designed to provide the best quality of life for the pet for as long as possible.
- Monitor your pet closely throughout treatment.
- Discuss euthanasia options with your veterinarian and outline a plan so you know how to proceed if necessary.

What You Need to Know

Cancer is extremely common in pets. While a diagnosis of cancer in a beloved pet can be devastating, it is important for owners to realize that many forms of cancer can be successfully treated or managed to provide the pet with an excellent quality of life. It is also important to realize that in pets, just as in people, some types of cancer are now viewed as a chronic, rather than a terminal, disease. The best way to fight cancer is to detect it early and begin treatment promptly.

Signs of Cancer

To detect cancer at its earliest, be sure to bring your pet in for regular veterinary examinations. Between examinations, monitor your pet for signs of cancer and schedule a checkup if any of the following appear:

- Abnormal lumps, bumps, or swellings anywhere on the body
- Sores or lesions that do not heal
- Unexplained weight loss or changes in appetite
- Bleeding or discharge from any body opening
- Unpleasant odor
- Difficulty urinating or defecating
- Persistent lameness
- Drooling or any signs of mouth discomfort

Diagnosing Cancer

If cancer is suspected, it is very important for you and your veterinarian to have as much information as possible when making serious decisions regarding treatment. An accurate diagnosis is essential. Your veterinarian will also want to correctly stage your pet's cancer. This will help your veterinarian determine how advanced the cancer is and what the projected success rates of various possible treatments might be. As a result, your veterinarian may recommend diagnostic procedures such as laboratory tests, biopsies, x-rays, ultrasound studies, and even exploratory surgery.

Treating Cancer

The goal of cancer treatment in pets is to provide the pet with the highest quality of life for as long as possible. Cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation are generally tolerated extremely well by canine and feline patients.

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When side effects occur, your veterinarian can prescribe anti-nausea and pain medications, as needed, as well as nutritional support to keep your pet comfortable during treatment.

In some cases, the cancer may be so advanced that your veterinarian may recommend palliative care only. This means that your pet's veterinary team will seek to keep your pet as comfortable as possible for as long as possible without pursuing more aggressive treatment options. The primary goal of cancer care in pets is always to maintain the best quality of life possible for your pet.

Choices and Considerations

What You Can Do to Help Your Pet Cope

- Be your pet's advocate. Watch your pet closely for signs that he or she is either doing well or experiencing pain or discomfort, and keep your veterinarian informed.
- Keep all scheduled veterinary appointments, and stay in contact with your veterinary team. It is there to help you.
- Provide your pet with lots of comfort care. Spend as much time as possible with your pet; provide a quiet, comfortable place to rest and sleep; and provide nutritional support and plenty of fresh water as needed. Your pet may need to urinate and defecate more often because of cancer treatment, so make your pet's "bathroom" as accessible as possible.
- Above all, enjoy your time with your pet!

Euthanasia Considerations

In the course of your pet's cancer care, you may realize that the "bad" days are starting to outnumber

the "good" days. When you feel that you have done the best that you, in your personal circumstances, can do for your pet, you may need to consider euthanasia. Many resources are available through your veterinarian or online to help you with this difficult decision. Most owners weigh not wishing to see a pet suffer against the desire not to deprive a pet of any remaining "good" days. When this time approaches for you and your pet, be sure to keep the lines of communication open with your veterinarian. Consult with him or her closely about your pet's medical status and learn what to expect in the days or weeks ahead. Make sure you know what the practice's procedures are for an emergency euthanasia, both during the business day and after hours, if your pet takes a sudden turn for the worse. Monitor your pet closely for signs that he or she may be in discomfort, and discuss these signs with your veterinary team.

Many owners worry about putting their pet through cancer treatment. However, pets typically handle cancer treatment extremely well.