



CAYMAN ANIMAL HOSPITAL

Cancer in Pets - Introduction

Cancer is an often life-threatening disease that many people think affects only humans. It comes as a shock to many pet owners when their pet is diagnosed with cancer. Cancer in animals is not uncommon.

Cancer can either be genetic, environmental, or just a random mutation, so it's very similar to cancer in people. The common types of cancer are diagnosed more frequently only because we can detect them more easily. These cancers involve the lymph nodes, limbs, or skin tumors. Lung tumors are more difficult to diagnose, so these tumors are generally not detected until the animal develops significant clinical symptoms.



There are a number of indicators that an animal may have cancer. The best way to detect cancer is for owners to carefully feel their animals all over once a week. Just pet them thoroughly once a week and feel for abnormal lumps, bumps, swellings, and any area that's just plain painful. Open ulcerated wounds that don't heal for a long time would be another potential sign of cancer.

There are also some non-specific clues like not eating well, weight loss, vomiting, or diarrhea. Also, certain breeds are more prone to cancer than others. Breeds such as boxers, Bernese mountain dogs, and golden retrievers are overrepresented in the development of cancer. There have even been studies that have traced the family tree of dogs. These studies have suggested a genetic predisposition in certain families.

Often the diagnosis of cancer leaves owners feeling that there is no hope for their pet. Many types of cancer can be successfully treated and these pets can return to a normal life.

Modern veterinary medicine ... Old fashioned care



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Before beginning a cancer treatment, many things are taken into consideration. Most important is the animal's quality of life versus the aggressiveness of the treatment. The same types of drugs that are used in human cancer therapy are used in veterinary cancer therapy. The chief difference is that we tend to use lower doses at less frequent intervals.



Veterinarians have designed their chemotherapy protocols for animals so the pets don't become terribly ill. Less than 5 percent of the animals develop severe vomiting, diarrhea or a drop in their blood counts.

Most pet cancer patients as well as the owners don't even realize that the animal has had chemotherapy. Owners always worry about the animal's hair falling out. Bald dogs do look pretty different, but it's actually not very common for their hair to fall out.

Cost is a significant factor in deciding whether or not to begin cancer treatments. For many people, their pets are more than just animals. Usually the owners want to do everything that they can in order to prolong their pets' lives and keep them feeling healthy.

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