

# Cancer Therapy

## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM RADIATION

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When you think of cancer, you may automatically think of a scary rollercoaster of emotions and intimidating treatment options, but this doesn't always have to be the case. Based on the type of cancer and its typical behavior, a variety of treatments such as radiation therapy, chemotherapy, or surgery may be recommended for your pet. Each of these treatment options offer a different approach to solving a similar problem.

Radiation therapy can be an effective treatment for certain tumors by exposing the cancer cells to a large dose of energy. This type of therapy is most effective on small areas of cancer within a limited region in the pet. For some patients, surgery is performed before radiation therapy to remove the majority of the tumor. In other patients, chemotherapy will be recommended during and/or following radiation therapy since radiation will only treat a local area of the pet. Based on the typical behavior of the tumor type, either radiation therapy alone or in combination with other treatments may be the ideal approach.

Radiation therapy is given in small daily doses, called fractions, over a period of time. The oncologist determines the number of treatments after taking into consideration the type of tumor and its location. Radiation may be given in larger fraction doses to target pain reduction and improve function. These treatments

require your pet to remain completely still for 10-20 minutes, so a short-acting general anesthetic is given prior to the delivery of radiation. Blood tests, radiographs, and careful monitoring minimize the risks associated with anesthesia. If your pet is undergoing radiation therapy, they must not eat for a minimum of 6-8 hours prior to each treatment. Temporary grogginess and decreased appetite are common side effects from anesthesia, but most pets recover quickly.



As with any type of cancer therapy, certain risks and side effects can occur. Since radiation therapy is limited to one region of the body, side effects are generally restricted to that area. Most side effects begin after 10-12 treatments and can last anywhere from 1-3 weeks. The skin covering a tumor treated with radiation therapy may become dry and flaky or moist and red, somewhat like a sunburn. Most skin related side effects resolve within 2 weeks of the final treatment, but the radiation oncologist may be able to recommend safe topical treatments or oral medication to

reduce the irritation.

If the target area of radiation includes the mouth or nose, ulceration of the moist tissue of the mouth can occur. This symptom is called mucositis. Oral rinses, soft foods low in sodium, and occasional topical numbing agents can reduce any discomfort your pet may feel. Since some of the treatments may temporarily decrease appetite, encouraging your pet to eat by enhancing the taste and smell of their food may help. Certain warmed odorous foods

such as pureed-meat baby food (without onions) and canned foods can increase their appetite.

If one or both eyes are near the radiation field, tear production may decrease and require an ointment or drops to be applied. Loss of hair in the treatment area is another long term side effect. Occasionally, the hair that regrows in the irradiated area will typically be a different color, most commonly white.

Other delayed side effects from radiation may not occur for months or even years following this type of therapy. While your pet is undergoing treatment, the radiation oncologist will carefully supervise the dose and delivery of radiation. Based on the individual characteristics of the tumor, the risks and side effects will be thoroughly discussed. Regardless of which treatment option you choose, our goal is to offer the best care possible by tailoring a treatment regime that is specific to your family's needs.