

Skin **CANCER** DETECTING AND TREATING

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Often when we think of cancer, we do not associate this disease with our pets. However, our sweet animals are susceptible to cancer too. This disease comes in many different shapes, sizes, forms and can affect many different species. It is not uncommon that many forms of cancer that can occur in animals can be very similar to cancer in humans. Tumors in the skin are some of the most commonly seen masses within both humans and animals.

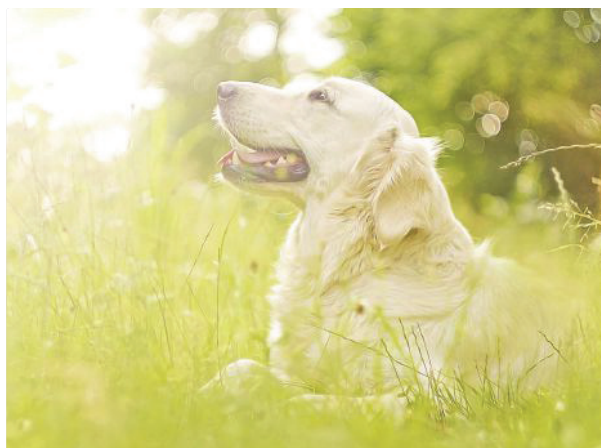
There are several different forms of skin cancer, including melanoma, mast cell tumors, squamous cell carcinomas, and cutaneous lymphoma. There are also many benign (non-cancerous) masses that can be found on the skin, such as cysts, benign follicular tumors, or sebaceous adenomas, which are warty little masses that are common on Poodles and Cocker Spaniels. Cancerous skin tumors can have different signs and symptoms that can range from raised masses on the skin to changes in pigmentation. For example, melanomas are often darkly pigmented masses on the skin or in the oral cavity, but sometimes they can also appear a normal flesh color. Cutaneous lymphoma, an uncommon form of skin cancer, can vary greatly in appearance and may often be confused with other diseases or even allergies. These two types of skin cancer are great examples of how each form has unique characteristics.

Like with many other diseases, early

diagnosis of skin cancer is helpful. If your pet is prone to developing little lumps and bumps, creating a “map” of the bumps will help you realize which masses are new and should be investigated. Fine needle aspirates are often very helpful with diagnosing masses and are a relatively simple part of a veterinary visit. If skin tumors are small enough, they can be removed with local blocks that numb the skin, without necessitating general anesthesia. However, if they are diagnosed as cancerous, often additional surgery or other treatments are recommended.

Throughout the years, science has made many advances in medicine and technology. These advancements allow our doctors to diagnose cancer with more accuracy and greater ease. With this new technology, doctors can treat different forms of cancer with procedures such as: conventional surgery, laser surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation therapy. Treatments for cancer vary depending on the kind of cancer, whether it has spread, and other important factors such as possible side effects. To find out which treatment would be best for your pet, consult with your veterinarian.

Like in humans, a direct cause for many forms of cancer cannot be pinpointed.



Some breeds, such as Boxers, English Bulldogs, and Siamese cats are predisposed to mast cell tumors, whereas schnauzers and Scottish terriers are predisposed to melanomas. As in humans, some forms of skin cancer are caused by sun exposure. With summer in full swing, it is important to keep in mind that even our furry friends can get too much sun. In sun exposure related cancers, prevention is key.

There are several ways to help protect your pet from the harmful rays of the sun. One way to help prevent skin cancer caused by sun exposure is to avoid letting your pet sunbathe for extended periods of time, especially during midday when the sun is the strongest. Sunbathing, especially in white or thinly-haired animals, can cause long-term changes in the skin. If your pet must be outside on a sunny day, t-shirts and zinc free sunscreens can help protect from ultraviolet rays. Make sure to keep these helpful tips in mind, especially during the warmer months.