

Treating Cancer In Pets

WHAT ARE THE TREATMENT OPTIONS?

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When trying to determine the best treatment for your pet's cancer, it is essential to know all the options. Depending on the tumor type and its behavior, a variety of treatments are available such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or surgery. These treatment options may be used individually or in combination. Surgery and radiation therapy address localized disease, whereas chemotherapy is best



when the cancer is in more than one area, or is expected to spread. The ideal treatment is the treatment option that addresses the typical behavior of the cancer at hand and fits your family's needs.

The most effective single treatment for systemic (throughout then body) cancer is chemotherapy. This treatment offers the best opportunity to target multiple sites while at the same time preserving a good quality of life. Chemotherapy is a drug or compound that is toxic to cancer cells and may be given intravenous, subcutaneous or orally. Most chemotherapy treatments work by damaging the cells ability to

divide, eventually destroying the cells. Chemotherapy may be used by itself or in conjunction with other treatment options such as surgery or radiation therapy.

After surgical removal of malignant tumors, chemotherapy may be employed. The purpose of chemotherapy in this scenario is not only to prevent recurrence of the cancer at the original site but also to prevent the spread of cancer or metastasis. Examples of cancer in which

chemotherapy is routinely used in this way may include feline malignant breast cancer and malignant bone tumors in dogs.

Radiation therapy may be administered to some pets while they are also receiving chemotherapy for treatment of their cancer. Since radia-

tion therapy is most effective on a small area of cancer within a limited region of the body, chemotherapy is usually suggested as a supplement to this treatment. Chemotherapy drugs can be effective in this situation because they increase the ability of radiation to eliminate the cancer cells as well as delay or prevent metastasis.

Occasionally, chemotherapy will be used alone for the treatment of cancers that are not amenable to surgical removal or radiation therapy, or for those that have already metastasized.

When trying to decide if chemotherapy

is the right treatment for your pet, it is important to know that there are risks involved with any type of cancer treatment. Since chemotherapy cannot distinguish between healthy cells and cancer cells, some healthy cells may be injured or destroyed during this treatment process. The destruction of healthy cells may result in secondary effects such as decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea and fur loss. However, oncologists aim for 80-90% of the quality of life prior to the detection of cancer. The chemotherapy side effects may be apparent but the benefits typically outweigh any symptoms.

Fur loss in pets receiving chemotherapy is usually very minor, with some notable breed exceptions. Curly coated terriers such as Airedales or Welsh Terriers tend to lose a significant amount of hair during the initial stages of chemotherapy. Usually, hair that is lost will grow back after your companion's course of chemotherapy has been completed, or once treatments are being administered less frequently.

Most pets will experience some type of side effects at least once or twice during the course of their treatment. The severity of the side effects is far less than human's experience. Although reactions for chemotherapy tend to be similar for both people and animals, our sweet companions generally tolerate treatment far better than the average human patient.