



November Is Pet Cancer Awareness Month!

Cancer is among the leading causes of death in dogs, and close to half of dogs over the age of 10 develop cancer, according to the American Veterinary Medical Association. There are nearly 100 types of pet cancers and while getting a cancer diagnosis can be devastating for a pet owner, dogs and cats today have a better chance of being successfully treated than ever before. Early recognition and diagnosis are crucial, so be aware of changes in behavior as well as sudden physical changes that could signal your pet has cancer. These are the most common warning signs of cancer in dogs and cats:

- 1. Sudden, Changing Lump:** As one of the most well-known signs of cancer in humans, the same is applicable to animals. A lump can be an indicator of many kinds of cancer (skin cancer is the most common in pets) and it should be biopsied as soon as possible to determine whether it's benign or malignant.
- 2. Abdominal Distention:** When the stomach area becomes rapidly enlarged, this may suggest a mass or tumor in the abdomen, or it may indicate bleeding that is occurring in this area. A radiograph or ultrasound of the abdomen can be very useful since abdominal tumors are the second most common in pets.
- 3. Swollen Lymph Nodes:** Dogs' and cats' lymph nodes can be found throughout the body, but are most easily detected behind the jaw or knees. When swollen, this can be a sign of lymphoma, another common cancer in pets.
- 4. Lameness:** Unexplained and sudden changes in stance and gait can be an indicator of bone cancer. Large and giant breed dogs older than 7 are most prone to bone cancer, while cats are rarely diagnosed with this type of cancer.
- 5. Oral Odor/Bleeding Gums:** Periodontal disease is common in pets and can lead to neoplasias in the mouth and neck, which tend to be malignant and aggressive. If you notice changes in appetite, chewing, food type preference (hard vs. soft food), and gum color, take your pet to your veterinarian immediately.
- 6. Persistent Sores:** Wounds that never quite heal and continue to bleed/discharge despite time, antibiotics, or ointments can be an indicator of multiple types of cancers. Have a veterinarian check it out if you're concerned about their sores.
- 7. Persistent Cough:** A dry, non-productive cough in older dogs could indicate a tumor near the lungs or heart. Keep in mind that younger dogs who have been recently adopted or boarded are more likely to be experiencing kennel cough than cancer.
- 8. Difficulty Urinating/Defecating:** While straining to pee is often an indicator of a urinary tract infection, there may be cause for concern if the UTIs are recurrent or bloody. Difficulty pooping and a sustained foul odor could also indicate a mass in or around the anal area.
- 9. Unusual Signs or Behaviors:** Additional ailments and behaviors that could be indicators of cancer include sudden weight gain/loss, chronic vomiting and/or diarrhea, unexplained bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, and sudden loss of stamina or energy.

When cancer is either suspected or confirmed, your veterinarian will recommend that you consult with a veterinary oncologist, who has obtained additional training and certification by the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) in oncology. Together, they will determine the best course of action and provide the best care for your pet. ■