

Three decades ago, oncology treatment was relatively unheard of in veterinary medicine. Today, we have an incredible variety of diagnostic and treatment options available for pets with cancer. Current treatment options include surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and targeted therapy. Pets with cancer can enjoy good quality of life and are often oblivious to their treatments. If you have a pet with cancer, we recommend you consult with a veterinary oncologist.

### WHO TREATS CANCER IN DOGS AND CATS?

At VSNT, a team of specialists is involved in cancer treatment. This team includes a medical oncologist and a radiation oncologist and may include an internal medicine specialist or a consultation with a surgeon in our sister practice, Dallas Veterinary Surgical Center, located within our building.

These are all board-certified veterinary specialists. Specialists are veterinarians who, after graduating from veterinary school, pursue more training in a specific field. This training usually lasts an additional 3-4 years (one year of internship, and 2-3 years of residency, depending on the specialty). To become board-certified, they must pass an extensive certifying exam after completing the training program.

### HOW CAN I FIND A VETERINARY ONCOLOGIST?

To locate a veterinary oncologist in your area, go to [American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine](#) website and click on **Search for a Specialist**.

### HOW OFTEN DO DOGS AND CATS DEVELOP CANCER?

Cancer is the leading cause of death in older dogs and cats. Approximately one in three dogs will develop cancer and one in four cats will develop cancer. Cancer is responsible for nearly 50% of the deaths of dogs 10 years and older and for approximately 30% of deaths in older cats.

### WHY DO ANIMALS DEVELOP CANCER?

Despite much research, it is still not well understood why animals (and humans) develop cancer. One major role seems to be genetics. In addition, exposure to certain environmental cancer-causing agents, called carcinogens, has been shown to increase the risk of cancer development. Some of these carcinogens include tobacco smoke, asbestos, lawn pesticides and herbicides, certain older type flea and tick dips (mostly older dip-type products), radiation, and sunlight (especially for white and light-skinned dogs and cats). Obesity and poor diet (such as unbalanced home-made type diets) has also been implicated in cancer development. Intact female dogs and cats are at a much higher risk for mammary cancer than their spayed counterparts.

### HOW DO I KNOW MY PET MIGHT HAVE CANCER?

It might be time to see your veterinarian if you notice your pet has:

- Lumps and bumps on their body
- Bleeding or discharge from any opening in the body
- Unexpected weight loss
- Labored breathing
- Difficulty breathing, urinating, or defecating
- Change in interaction with the family/ hiding
- Bleeding from the nose or mouth
- Sores that do not heal
- Persistent bad breath or offensive odors
- Change in eating and/or bowel habits
- Persistent limping
- Lethargy/unwilling to exercise
- Vomiting or diarrhea
- Seizures

Do not wait. Early detection is critical! Diagnosis of cancer is NOT a death sentence. Many types of cancer can be treated if diagnosed early.

### HOW IS CANCER DIAGNOSED?

- Fine-needle aspirate cytology. Your doctor collects a few cells from the tumor using a small needle. This test is quick, inexpensive, and non-invasive, and does not require anesthesia.
- Biopsy and histopathology. Your doctor collects a piece of the tumor. This generally requires anesthesia.

### WHAT IS BENIGN VERSUS MALIGNANT TUMOR?

- **Tumor:** a tumor means swelling, not necessarily cancer.
- **Benign:** a non-cancerous, slow-growing tumor; does not metastasize, usually not life-threatening; Will not grow back if appropriately removed.
- **Malignant:** a cancerous growth, can metastasize; most malignant tumors grow rapidly.

### WHAT ARE SOME COMMON CANCERS OF DOGS AND CATS?

Skin tumors (Such as mast cell tumor in dogs)  
Mammary tumors  
Lymphoma  
Oral tumors  
Bone tumors  
Sarcomas (connective tissue tumors)  
Thyroid tumors  
Anal sac/gland tumors

### HOW IS CANCER TREATED IN A DOG OR CAT?

The veterinary oncologist works together with the owner to discuss and decide on the best treatment plan for their pet. Treatment often depends on several things, such as tumor size and whether the tumor has already spread to other parts of the body (metastasized). The veterinary oncologist may use the following treatments alone or in combination with each other: surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, and immunotherapy.

### DO PETS GET SICK FROM CHEMOTHERAPY LIKE HUMANS?

Unlike their human counterparts, chemotherapy usually does not adversely affect most dogs and cats. Side-effects occur only in about 10-15% of treated cases and are usually self-limiting and easily treatable at home. Most animal chemotherapy patients don't get sick at all!

### DO PETS LOSE THEIR HAIR FROM CHEMOTHERAPY LIKE HUMANS?

Most dogs and cats don't lose their hair coat after chemotherapy. Rarely, breeds that grow their hair coat continuously, such as Poodles, Old English Sheep Dogs, Maltese, Lhasa Apso, Shi tzu and poodle breed mixes like Goldendoodles may lose some of their hair during chemotherapy. Cats typically don't lose their hair, but they may temporarily lose their whiskers. Shaved areas tend to grow back slowly, however.

### CAN MY PET BE CURED FROM CANCER?

Quite a few cancers can be cured if they are diagnosed early. This can depend on the type of cancer and the types of treatments chosen for your pet. Some cancers are not curable, but they can be put in remission and quality of life during treatment and remission can be normal or near normal. With treatment your pet can enjoy a longer, happier life. Many pets can live a completely normal life with few signs of illness during treatment.