



Warning Signs of Cancer

Early Detection is Key

Pets have become members of our families, and as we take better care of them, they are living happier, longer lives. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, cancer is one of the leading causes of death in dogs and cats. Early detection is key to a better outcome, and this is why we have collaborated with The Veterinary Cancer Center to come up with 10 warning signs of cancer.

- **Swollen Lymph Nodes** - These “glands” are located all throughout the body but are most easily detected under the jaw or behind the knee. When lymph nodes are enlarged they can suggest a common form of cancer called lymphoma. A biopsy or cytology of these enlarged lymph nodes can aid in the obtaining a diagnosis.
- **An Enlarging or Changing Lump** - Any lump on a pet that is rapidly growing or changing in texture or shape should have a biopsy. Lumps belong in biopsy jars, not on pets.
- **Abdominal Distension** - When the “stomach” or belly becomes enlarged rapidly, this may suggest a mass or tumor in the abdomen or indicate bleeding that is occurring in this area. A radiograph or an ultrasound of the abdomen can be very useful in this situation.
- **Chronic Weight Loss** - When a pet is losing weight and you have not put your pet on a diet, you should have your pet checked. This sign is not diagnostic for cancer, but can indicate that something is wrong. Many cancer patients have weight loss.
- **Chronic Vomiting or Diarrhea** - Unexplained vomiting or diarrhea should prompt further investigation. Tumors of the gastrointestinal tract can often cause chronic vomiting and/or diarrhea. Radiographs, ultrasound examinations and endoscopy are useful diagnostic tools when this occurs.
- **Unexplained Bleeding** - Bleeding from the mouth, nose, gums or blood in the urine or stool, that is not due to trauma should be examined. Although bleeding disorders do occur in pets, they usually are discovered at a younger age. If unexplained bleeding starts when a pet is old, a thorough search should be undertaken.
- **Cough** - A dry, non-productive cough in an older pet should prompt chest radiographs to be taken. This type of cough is the most common sign of lung cancer. Please remember there are many causes of cough in dogs and cats.
- **Lameness** - Unexplained lameness (especially in large or giant breed dogs) is a very common sign of bone cancer. Radiographs of the affected area are useful for detecting cancer of the bone.
- **Straining to Urinate** - Straining to urinate and blood in the urine usually indicate a urinary tract infection, however, if the straining and bleeding do not resolve rapidly with antibiotics or are recurrent, cancer of the bladder may be the underlying cause. Cystoscopy or other techniques that allow a veterinarian to take a biopsy of the bladder are useful and sometimes necessary to establish a definitive diagnosis in these cases.
- **Oral Odor** - Oral tumors do occur in pets and can cause a pet to change its food preference (i.e. from hard to soft foods) or cause a pet to change the manner in which he/she chews their food. Many times a foul odor can be detected in pets with oral tumors. A thorough oral examination with radiographs or CT scan, requiring sedation, is often necessary to determine the underlying cause.

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