

Cancer: Early detection is the key to a better outcome!

Pets now-a-days have a better chance of being successfully treated for cancer than previous. This is due to better treatment options, early diagnosis, and advances in cancer care. Almost half of the dogs over 10 years of age will be detected with cancer. Early detection always helps for a better outcome.

What are the advantages of early detection?

With early detection, treatment can be started early. This would minimize the chances of spread to other organs. The longer the primary tumor (the main tumor) stays on the body more of a chance there is for it to spread to other organs. The other advantage is that if we detect a mass when it is small, the surgery involved would be smaller as well. This will eventually cause less trauma to the pet. Hence, after further testing is done to find the extent of the tumor and to know if it spreads to other parts of the body, we very strongly recommend the removal of the mass as soon as possible.

How can cancer be detected early?

For pets who are more than 8 years old, it is always a good idea to have your family veterinarian examine them every 6 months to a yearly interval. Basic tests like blood work, chest radiographs (x-rays), and abdominal ultrasound may help detect cancer sooner before your pet even starts showing any clinical signs associated with the tumor. In case there are obvious masses noted on the body, your family veterinarian would also suggest additional tests like taking a small sample of the mass with a needle to look at it under the microscope.

What are the tools to diagnose cancer?

Cancer is often suspected on the basis of the pet's symptoms, medical history, and physical examination. Additional tests, such as radiographs (x-rays), blood tests, an ultrasound examination can be done. For most tumors, cytology (taking some cells from a mass to examine under a microscope) provides basic information and can confirm a diagnosis for certain types of cancer. For many tumors, a biopsy – taking a much bigger tissue sample from the tumor for examination under a microscope – is often necessary to confirm the diagnosis and help determine if the tumor is benign or malignant. Additional cytology or biopsies of other tissues, such as lymph nodes, may be necessary to determine how far a malignant neoplasm (cancer) has spread. Advanced imaging such as computed tomography (CT) scan, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) can be used to further give information about the location and extent of the tumor.

Remember, early detection is the key to a better outcome!