

Common Signs of Cancer in Pets

“CANCER” is a terrifying word, but some cancers can be cured, and the others better treated if detected early. That is why it is so important for pet parents to be vigilant and look out for common signs of cancer, especially in older pets.

Common signs of cancer:

- Any lumps or bumps on the body that are changing in size: Any lumps or bumps on the body should be immediately be checked out. Usually, your family veterinarian will take a small sample from the growth and check it under the microscope. There is no reason NOT to sample a lump even if it's not causing any discomfort to the pet.
- Rapid, long term weight loss: Even though this is not a direct diagnosis of cancer, a lot of cancers can cause chronic weight loss. So, if your pet is losing weight when they are not on a diet, get it evaluated.
- Bleeding/discharge from any openings: Unexplained bleeding or discharge in an older pet is concerning. If you see any blood in the water bowl, nasal discharge, or in stool or urine, a thorough check should be done.
- Chronic cough: Even though there can be other reasons for coughing in animals, dry, chronic cough in older animals has to be investigated by performing chest x-rays.
- Foul odor from the mouth: A lot of older animals do have dental disease causing the foul odor, but they can also get oral tumors. Any change in food preference from hard to soft food, eating only from one side of the mouth, unwillingness to eat should be investigated. Further tests like CT scan and X-rays may be recommended to evaluate the extent of the tumor.
- Swelling of glands called lymph nodes: These glands are present everywhere in the body, but the most commonly noted ones are under the chin and the back of the leg. If you note any swelling in these locations, further testing like a fine needle aspirate would be recommended. This may be common cancer called lymphoma.
- Straining to urinate: Straining to urinate and blood in the urine usually indicate a urinary tract infection or presence of stones, but if the straining and bleeding are not controlled with antibiotics or keep happening often, cancer of the bladder, urethra or prostate 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.
- Uncontrolled, long term vomiting or diarrhea: Unexplained vomiting or diarrhea may be caused due to cancer of the gastrointestinal tract. Further diagnostics like an abdominal ultrasound may be recommended.
- Lameness: Lameness, most often than not in older dogs, is attributed to arthritis. Unexplained lameness, especially in medium and larger breed dogs, is a common sign for bone tumors. Radiographs of the affected area would help to diagnose cancer.

- Big belly: When the stomach becomes rapidly big and swollen, this may suggest a mass or tumor in the abdomen, or it may indicate some bleeding that is occurring in this area. A radiograph or an ultrasound of the abdomen can be very useful
- Seizures or other neurological signs: In an older dog with no history of seizure, some brain tumors may be on top of the list of differentials. Other signs like head tilt, not being able to walk properly, falling over while walking may also occur. Additional imaging like MRI would be helpful for further diagnosis.