



The University of Georgia

College of Veterinary Medicine

Oncology Service

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www.vet.uga.edu/cancer

Cancer is the leading cause of death in companion animals over the age of 10 years. Fortunately with improvements in both diagnostic capabilities and treatment options, pets with cancer can live longer lives while maintaining an excellent quality of life. The cause of most cancers is not known, but is likely due to many factors, such as genetic predisposition, environmental factors, and certain viruses. The following information is provided for your reference. If you are concerned that your pet may have cancer, we advise that you speak to your veterinarian. If your pet has been diagnosed with cancer, then referral to a veterinary oncologist may be indicated.

Common Signs of Cancer in Companion Animals

- Abnormal swellings that persist or continue to grow
- Non-healing sores
- Weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Bleeding or discharge from any body opening
- Offensive odor
- Difficulty eating or swallowing
- Hesitation to exercise or loss of stamina
- Persistent lameness or stiffness
- Difficulty breathing, urinating or defecating

Stage versus Grade?

If your pet has been diagnosed with cancer, further testing (called *staging*) may be advised in order to determine if the cancer has spread to other locations (called metastases). Staging typically involves performing non-invasive tests such as blood work and urinalysis, chest radiographs (x-rays), abdominal imaging (including radiographs and ultrasound), and lymph node evaluation. For certain cancers (such as lymphoma and mast cell disease), bone marrow evaluation may be advised. Depending on the type of cancer, advanced imaging (such as CT scan or MRI) may be indicated in order to further define the location and extent of the tumor. We will discuss what staging tests are recommended for your pet at the time of your initial consultation and we will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Determining the *grade* of a tumor involves evaluating a sample of the tumor under the microscope by a pathologist. The characteristics that determine the grade are usually specific for each type of cancer. Knowing both the stage and grade will help to determine the best course of treatment and the prognosis for your pet.

Indications for Definitive Radiation Therapy in Dogs and Cats

Depending on the type of cancer that your pet has been diagnosed with, definitive radiation therapy may be recommended either alone or in combination with other therapies (such as [surgery](#) and [chemotherapy](#)). The following list highlights some of the more common cancers that are treated with radiation therapy. For further details regarding [radiation therapy](#), please refer to the additional information provided.

- Acanthomatous epulis
- Anal sac adenocarcinoma
- Brain and spinal tumors
- Injection site sarcomas (feline)
- Mast cell tumor
- Nasal tumors
- Oral malignant melanoma
- Salivary carcinomas
- Skin carcinomas
- Soft tissue sarcomas (canine)
- Thyroid carcinoma