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Cancer in companion animals

Neoplasia refers to the uncontrolled and abnormal growth of cells or tissues in the body, resulting in the formation of a neoplasm or tumor. These growths can be either benign or malignant. Benign neoplasms do not aggressively grow, invade surrounding tissues, or spread to other parts of the body, whereas malignant neoplasms grow rapidly, invade nearby tissues, and can metastasize. The term "cancer" specifically refers to malignant neoplasms. In companion animals, neoplasia is common and its occurrence increases with age, with cancer being responsible for nearly half of the deaths in companion animals over 10 years old. Diagnosis of neoplasms involves evaluating the patient's medical history and conducting physical examinations, as well as additional tests like radiographs, blood tests, ultrasound, and biopsies. The cause of most neoplasms is unknown, making prevention challenging, but early detection and treatment offer the best chances of managing these conditions in companion animals.

Tipos comunes de neoplasia en animales de compañía

Cutaneous neoplasia, or skin cancer, is more common in older dogs than in cats. While in cats most skin neoplasms are malignant, in dogs they are usually benign. It is important for veterinarians to examine all skin neoplasms in both dogs and cats to determine if any are malignant. Mammary gland neoplasia, or breast cancer, is more common in cats than in dogs. More than 85% of mammary neoplasms in female cats are malignant, compared to 50% in female dogs. Spaying or neutering your pet before it is 12 months old greatly reduces the risk of mammary gland neoplasia. Neoplasia of the mouth is common in dogs, but less common in cats. Signs to watch for are masses or tumors on the gums, bleeding, odor, or difficulty eating. Since many oral tumors are malignant, early and aggressive treatment is essential. Neoplasia can also develop inside the nose of both cats and dogs, and signs such as nosebleeds, difficulty breathing or facial swelling should be examined by a veterinarian. Lymphoma, a type of neoplasm, affects both dogs and cats. It is characterized by the enlargement of one or more lymph nodes in the body. In some cats, the contagious feline leukemia virus may be the cause of lymphoma. Testicular neoplasia is rare in cats but common in dogs, especially those with retained testes. Neoplasms inside the abdomen are common in both cats and dogs, but early diagnosis can be difficult. Signs such as weight loss or abdominal swelling should not be ignored. Bone neoplasms are more common in large breed dogs over seven years of age, and rarely in cats. Bones close to the joints, especially in the paws, are the most common locations of these tumors. Signs such as persistent pain, lameness and swelling are indications of bone neoplasms. It is important to note that although the above signs can also manifest in non-neoplastic conditions, they still warrant immediate veterinary attention to determine the underlying cause. With early diagnosis, neoplasia is usually treatable, and prompt medical intervention will allow your veterinarian to provide the best possible care.

How is cancer treated?

Each type of neoplasm, or tumor, requires a personalized approach to treatment. Options may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, cryosurgery, hyperthermia, or immunotherapy. The overall health of your pet is also taken into consideration, and dietary changes or other measures may be recommended by your veterinarian to support treatment. After a diagnosis is made, your veterinarian will discuss the best treatment options, including the associated risks and side effects. Pain management is an important aspect of treatment, and in some cases, you may be referred to a specialist or oncologist. While some types of malignancies can be cured, others can only be treated to minimize spread and improve your pet's comfort. The success of treatment often depends on the early detection of the neoplasm and its type. It is important to have an open discussion with your veterinarian about the available options, including euthanasia, to make the best decision for your pet and family.

What is the success rate?

It depends largely on the type and extent of the neoplasm, as well as the aggressiveness of the therapy. Benign neoplasms are usually easier to treat, and treatment of any type of neoplasm is more likely to be successful if detected early. Although some neoplasms (especially the more aggressive cancers) cannot be cured, treatment can prolong your pet's life and improve his or her quality of life.

What will happen in the future?

Every day we learn more about neoplasia thanks to research and experience. Today, animals have a better chance of being successfully treated for neoplasia and cancer than ever before and the more we know about it, the more animal lives we can improve and save. New diagnostic methods can help detect malignancies earlier and improve your pet's chances and new ones are being developed that have better success rates with less risk of side effects. Thanks to today's technology, veterinarians have developed this cancer.

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