

Veterinary Specialty Hospital

How Can I help lower My Pet's Risk of Cancer?

While there is no guaranteed way to prevent cancer in pets, there are several steps pet owners can take to help lower the risk. Limiting exposure to known risk factors is important. This includes spaying or neutering your pet when appropriate and reducing prolonged exposure to direct sunlight. Routine veterinary examinations are also essential, as regular checkups and recommended screening tests can help detect potential health concerns early.

What Specialized Training Does a Veterinary Oncologist Complete?

Veterinary oncologists undergo extensive education and advanced specialty training beyond veterinary school.

To earn this certification, veterinarians complete:

- Four years of undergraduate education and four years of veterinary school
- Several additional years of advanced clinical training and residency experience at a veterinary teaching hospital
- A comprehensive credentialing process through the ACVIM
- A rigorous board certification examination

Veterinarians who complete this process may use the designation “DACVIM” after their name or refer to themselves as Diplomates of the ACVIM.

This advanced education allows veterinary oncologists to provide highly specialized care focused on improving both quality of life and treatment outcomes for pets diagnosed with cancer.

What Types of Treatment are Available for Pets with Cancer?

Cancer treatment in veterinary medicine is designed to target and destroy cancer cells while preserving healthy tissue whenever possible. Unlike human oncology, where the primary goal is often complete cure, veterinary oncology typically focuses on extending a pet's lifespan without sacrificing comfort and quality of life.

Depending on the type and stage of cancer, treatment plans may include one or more of the following approaches:

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Immunotherapy

Veterinary oncologists often combine multiple treatment methods to create the most effective and individualized care plan for each patient.

Will My Pet Experience Side Effects From Chemotherapy?

Most pets tolerate chemotherapy significantly better than many people expect. Advances in veterinary oncology have made treatment protocols safer, more effective, and associated with fewer side effects than in the past.

In veterinary medicine, chemotherapy treatments are generally less aggressive than those used in human medicine, which means pets often experience fewer and more mild side effects. While some pets may experience temporary nausea, decreased appetite, or low energy, severe reactions are uncommon.

Veterinary oncologists also have a wide range of supportive care options available to help keep pets comfortable during treatment. These may include pain management strategies, nutritional support, and medications to control nausea or digestive upset.

many families are surprised that pets continue to enjoy their normal routines and maintain a good quality of life throughout cancer treatment.

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How Can I Keep My Pet From Getting Cancer?

Just as in people, there is no proven way to keep your pet from getting cancer. You can, however, take steps to minimize the risks. Avoid any known predisposing causes, such as not spaying or neutering pets, or leaving pets exposed to sunlight. Also make sure your pet has regularly scheduled checkups and follow your veterinarian's advice regarding any necessary screening tests.

What Additional Training Does A Veterinary Oncologist Have?

Any veterinarian who wants to specialize in oncology must first be certified as an internal medicine specialist. Veterinarians who want to become board certified in internal medicine must seek additional, intensive training to become a specialist and earn this prestigious

credentialing. Specialty status is granted by the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM). A veterinarian who has received this specialty status will list the initials, 'DACVIM,' after his or her DVM degree. Or, the veterinarian may indicate that he or she is a 'Diplomate' of the ACVIM. The word 'Diplomate' typically means the specialist has achieved the following:

Obtained a traditional 8 year veterinary degree (four years of college plus four years of veterinary school).

Completed an additional three to six years of advanced training, including a residency at a veterinary teaching hospital where the veterinarian will have trained with some of the best experts in the field and obtained hands on experience.

Completed the credentialing application process established by the ACVIM

Passed a rigorous general examination.

Once a veterinarian is board certified in internal medicine, he or she may seek additional specialty status in veterinary oncology. Internal medicine specialists must obtain additional training in this area and sit for a second, even more intensive examination. These doctors will list their credentials after their boarded status, for example, as 'DAVCIM (Oncology).'

When your pet needs the care of a veterinary internal medicine specialist/veterinary oncologist, years of intensive training and additional education will be focused on helping him or her to recover from the disease and/or enjoy the highest quality of life possible.

What are Cancer Treatment Methods?

The goal of cancer therapy is to destroy abnormal cancer cells while sparing normal cells. An important difference in human vs. animal oncology is that the goal with humans, due to our extended life spans, is to cure the disease. In animals, the goal is more to extend the length of life while still maintaining its quality. In many cases, a veterinary oncologist will combine some or all of the treatment options outlined below in order to provide the very best outcome for your pet.

Surgery

Radiation Treatment

Chemotherapy

Immunotherapy

Will Chemotherapy Make My Pet Sick?

Your veterinary oncologist will give you specific instructions regarding your pet's chemotherapy, but in general, you should be aware that pets typically handle chemotherapy regimens far better than people do. First, as cancer treatment for both humans and small animals has become more sophisticated, the side effects created by chemotherapy regimens have become less severe. Second, chemotherapy administration in animals is less aggressive than it is in humans, so animals typically do not become as sick from the side effects as do people.

Finally, veterinary oncologists have many options at their disposal to help keep your pet comfortable during treatment for his or her disease. From pain management options to special nutritional recommendations to medications that can help lessen the nausea associated with chemotherapy, be assured that veterinary oncologists can keep most pets surprisingly comfortable during treatment. In fact, one of the biggest hurdles to treating pets with cancer is that many owners imagine their pet's treatment will be more difficult than it really is.