

How to Protect Against Canine Cancer

Changes in diet could increase your dog's life expectancy.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q: I lost my 11-year-old Dalmatian, Maxwell, to liver cancer. I am still in shock that he is gone. I have two other Dalmatians, ages 10 and 11. These dogs are like my children. What vitamins, minerals and supplements would help boost their immune systems? I've heard mushroom extracts, green tea and fish oil help fight tumors and prevent cancer. I'd like to know what substances are beneficial and in what dosages.

A: I am very sorry to hear about the loss of your dog. Cancer is an insidious disease that avoids detection until it is too late. Often, the side effects of some cancer treatments can be worse than the disease itself.

Many pet-product manufacturers have marketed products that claim to boost the immune system, but currently there is little evidence to support these claims. The Food and Drug Administration does not oversee the use of supplements, minerals, and other over-the-counter medications or nutraceuticals for pets, so it is difficult to know if an ingredient is helpful or harmful to your dog.

Some human studies have shown that a high-quality diet that contains vitamins, trace minerals and antioxidants may improve life expectancy. I would recommend putting your dogs on a premium food formulated for seniors. Ask your vet or other dog owners for recommendations.

A dietary change that has been shown to extend life expectancy in dogs is introducing a calorie-restricted diet. This conclusion is based on a dietary trial where a group of Golden Retrievers was fed a calorie-restricted diet for their entire lives. They lived an average of one to two years longer than the group that were fed free choice.

Also, make sure your dogs are at an ideal weight and body condition score, have regular veterinary exams (twice a year is now recommended) and are fed a high-quality diet.

Jon Geller, DVM