

## No Easy Test for Dog's Cancer

**Owner attention to canine cancer warning signs is a good start.**

*By Jon Geller, DVM*

**Q.** I just lost my dog to liver tumors. I have two other dogs and want the very best for them. I want to build up their immune systems to a superior level so if any cancer cells invade their bodies, their immune systems can fight off the infection and they will have a fighting chance. What amounts of vitamin and mineral supplements or natural herbs will they need to accomplish this? Also, what is your opinion about having all of ultrasounds done on their organs as a preventive measure?

**A.** I am sorry to hear about the loss of your dog to cancer. Cancer is an insidious disease that is difficult to detect and difficult to treat. In the best case scenario, early detection can lead to some treatments that have minimal side effects and extend a good quality of life for a year or two. Cancer is the leading cause of death in dogs, apart from motor vehicle accidents.

Unfortunately, no scientific evidence proves that vitamin and mineral supplements, herbal remedies or other treatments can prevent cancer. I would be cautious about adding any of these supplements.

Ultrasound scanning of the abdominal organs is not a very effective or sensitive method for detecting cancer. By the time the ultrasound detects any abnormalities, the cancer would be most probably fairly advanced.

The most practical method would be annual or biannual blood tests, good physical exams and possibly screening X-rays. Again, cancer can be very hard to detect.

The most sensitive, and expensive, way to detect any early cancer in the abdomen would be a procedure known as laparoscopy. A type of magnifying telescope is put into the abdomen to examine the organs in great detail. Although this procedure is considered minimally invasive, it does require general anesthesia.

Your own attention to any minor changes in your dogs can be the most effective weapon in early detection of cancer. Monitor appetite, attitude, energy levels and body weight. Feel for any new lumps or bumps, and report any changes to your veterinarian.

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