

Causes, Treatments of Common Canine Cancers

Although no cure for canine cancer exists, dog owners can take steps to alleviate symptoms and ward off carcinogens.

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Fifty percent of dogs age 10 and older will be diagnosed with cancer, according to Texas A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences. Heather Wilson, DVM, an assistant clinical professor at the school, and her colleagues have a few recommendations for pet owners in regards to common causes of canine cancers, and some of their treatments.

Lymphoma is the most common canine cancer, according to the university. The cancer causes enlargement of the lymph nodes, liver, and spleen. Although the cancer is almost always fatal, steps can be taken to lengthen the quality of a dog's life.

"Chemotherapy proves to be an effective treatment for lymphoma, but this treatment only adds about an average of a year to the animal's life," Wilson said.

The treatment alleviates many abnormalities and symptoms of the cancer, and dogs generally have a high quality of life during the chemotherapy, according to the university.

Another form of cancer, Cutaneous hemangiosarcoma (appears as lesions on the skin) can be caused by sun exposure and more commonly occurs in Whippets and Italian Greyhounds due to their lighter pigment and thin hair. Infant sunscreens can help protect dogs who enjoy sunbathing, and ultraviolet light protection shades applied to windows can keep the sun's harmful rays from shining through.

"Infant sunscreen should not be applied daily, just when the animal will be outside for an extended period of time. The sunscreen is not toxic and can help lower the risk for this cancer," Wilson said.

To reduce the risk of pets developing bladder cancer, dog owners can ensure their pets are not exposed to toxins in the environment, such as herbicides that are sometimes used in residential areas.

Although researchers have yet to find a cure for cancer, pet owners have several options once a dog is diagnosed. Many cancers can be cured if caught in the early stages, therefore regular veterinarian visits are key to keeping dogs healthy.