

The Right Combination for Better Dog Health

Antioxidants can help diminish cancer and chemotherapy side effects in your dog.

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Since you are what you eat, many owners rethink the diets of their dogs that have been diagnosed with cancer. But the subject of cancer diets is controversial, and you'll probably get a different answer depending on whom you ask, says Antony Moore, BVSc, MVSc, American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine diplomate, and head of the Harrington Oncology Program at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton, Mass. While some studies show that low-carbohydrate, high-fat, high-protein diets are optimal for cancer patients, there's also something to be said for not changing diet too drastically, especially because dogs with cancer tend to have less steady appetites. Many owners switch to a homecooked diet using the low-carb, high-protein guidelines, but pet-food companies also are beginning to recognize the need for a special diet for dogs with cancer. University surveys of owners show that many use nutritional supplements, anything from vitamin C to some of the more avant-garde medicines, such as shark cartilage or mushroom extracts, says Moore. But he's not convinced of their efficacy. Nancy Scanlan, DVM, a holistically oriented veterinarian at the Sherman Oaks Veterinary Group in Sherman Oaks, Calif., believes strongly in supplementing a dog with antioxidants, either to help boost the immune system to fight cancer or to mitigate some of the toxic effects of treatment. She points to studies from Eastern Europe, where antioxidant therapy is used on human patients with terminal cancer simply because there is no access to, nor money for, anything else. The results show, she says, that the patients feel better and their life expectancy is prolonged, be it for one month or six months. Even if you don't believe in antioxidant therapy for anti-cancer, one thing everyone pretty well agrees on is the animals feel better. The key, says Scanlan, is using multiple antioxidants, not just one. Her recommended protocol includes appropriate doses of vitamin C, vitamin E, mixed carotenoids, the B vitamin IP6, Coenzyme Q10, and alpha-lipoic acid.