



Lymphoma in Cats



Lymphoma is a malignant cancer of the lymphatic system. Lymph is a fluid that contains white blood cells that fight infection. The lymph also transports fat around the body, helps to maintain

the proper amount of fluid within cells, and picks up bacteria and viruses along with metabolic waste products and tissue debris.

The lymph flows throughout the body in vessels similar to blood vessels and eventually drains back into the blood. The lymph also goes to lymph nodes where the white blood cells will work to kill bacteria or viruses that the lymph picks up. This is why your lymph nodes (“glands”) swell up when you are sick. Lymph nodes are located on the neck, in front of the shoulder, in the “armpit”, in the groin, and behind the knees on the surface of the body. There are also ones within the chest and abdomen.

The spleen and thymus are part of the lymphatic system. There is also lymphoid tissue within the gastrointestinal (GI – stomach and intestines) tract as well. All of these are important parts of our immune system.

Types

Lymphoma is one of the most common cancers in cats. It can affect all of the lymphatic system throughout the body. It is called multicentric when it affects the lymph nodes both on the surface and within the body, mediastinal when it is in the chest cavity, and alimentary when it affects the GI tract.

The multicentric and mediastinal types are often due to infections caused by Feline Leukemia Virus (FeLV) and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV). The most common type seen today is the alimentary one.

Most cats with lymphoma are older and cats that have either FeLV or FIV are at greater risk. Recent studies have shown that cats exposed to tobacco smoke were at an elevated risk for the GI type.

Signs & Testing

Signs will vary depending on the tissues involved. They often include weight loss, poor appetite, and lethargy. With the GI type, vomiting and diarrhea are common. If it is in the chest, the cat may have difficulty breathing. Lymph nodes may be enlarged on the surface or x-rays show enlargements in the chest or abdomen.



The liver or spleen may be enlarged and the intestines thickened. It can affect the skin causing redness or flakiness, ulcers (deep sores) especially around the lips and pads of the feet, itchiness, or lumps in the skin.

Cats will have blood and urine tests done in addition to x-rays and ultrasound when looking for lymphoma. Biopsies will confirm the diagnosis.

Treatment

The primary treatment for lymphoma is chemotherapy. Surgery or radiation may be options in certain cases. Survival time with treatment is generally just six months on average, though some cats will live longer.

We can recommend some herbs and supplements that can be helpful for cancer patients whether you use conventional therapies or not. They work on improving the immune system so the body can control the cancer on its own. The hardest part with cats is getting them to take the medications, but some pets have responded incredibly well to them.

Prevention

You can't really prevent lymphoma but testing and protecting your cat from FeLV and FIV are important. Avoid tobacco smoke in the house where your cat lives.



Early detection may improve survival rate. Have your cat examined twice a year starting at 7-8 years of age including blood tests and possibly ultrasound or x-rays.