

Canine and Feline Lymphoma

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Lymphoma is a cancer of a specific white blood cell called the lymphocyte. These cells are found throughout the body and most commonly in the lymph nodes, spleen, and bone marrow. Lymphoma is one of the most common cancers in the dog with an annual incidence between 13 and 24 per 100,000 dogs at risk. Lymphoma is the most common tumor seen in the cat with an incidence of 200 per 100,000 cats at risk.

Chemotherapy is the treatment of choice for lymphoma. The goal of chemotherapy for animals with lymphoma is to induce a remission by killing most of the cancer cells. Remission means that all symptoms of the cancer have disappeared. Animals with lymphoma that are in complete remission look like normal animals by all tests. They do not have any signs of cancer, and all masses or lumps have disappeared. They eat, drink, and run just as they did before they developed cancer. Some of the cancer cells do survive in an animal in complete remission, but the numbers are too small to detect. Eventually, these few cells will grow and the cancer will become evident again. When this happens the animal is said to be "out of remission." Sometimes a second remission can be achieved with additional chemotherapy. At some point, the cancer cells will become resistant or insensitive to all drugs and the lymphoma will continue to progress despite therapy. Unfortunately, in most patients lymphoma is not a curable disease, but long-term remissions can be obtained.

A patient's long-term prognosis is dependent upon many factors including but not limited to: substage of disease, stage of disease, immunophenotype of the lymphoma, chemotherapy protocol used, and response to therapy. All of these factors can be considered together to determine an individual patient's overall prognosis for remission and survival.