

FELINE LYMPHOMA

Lymphoma (lymphosarcoma) is a very common cancer seen in cats. It is a cancer of lymphocytes (a type of blood cell) and lymphoid tissues. Lymphoid tissue is normally present in many places in the body including lymph nodes, spleen, liver, gastrointestinal tract and bone marrow. Lymphoma in cats comes in several forms, including gastrointestinal, mediastinal (chest), multicentric (involving many lymph nodes) and extranodal (involving organs such as the eyes, brain, kidney, skin, etc). The most common form in cats is the gastrointestinal form. There is increased risk for gastrointestinal lymphoma in cats in smoking households, and cats with virus infections such as FeLV and FIV also have increased risk for lymphoma. Some breeds of cats are at increased risk, including Siamese and Persians.

The diagnosis for this cancer is based upon either cytology of a lymph node (needle aspirate) or a biopsy of an abnormal lymph node or organ. Multiple diagnostics are recommended in order to "stage" the disease, or in other words, to determine if the lymphoma cells are in other parts of the body besides the lymph nodes (i.e. the spleen, liver, bone marrow, or other organs). These tests include a CBC and serum chemistry to evaluate all body systems and monitor electrolytes, kidney function, and liver damage; urinalysis to monitor kidney function and to look for infection or other changes; chest radiographs (x-rays) to look for evidence of spread to the chest cavity, lymph nodes, or lungs; abdominal ultrasound to evaluate the spleen, liver, other organs, and abdominal lymph nodes for evidence of the cancer; and occasionally a bone marrow aspirate to look for presence of cancer in the bone marrow.

Once a diagnosis is achieved, the lymphoma is categorized into one of two general types: low grade (also called "small cell" or "lymphocytic") or high grade (also called "large cell" or "lymphoblastic"). The type of lymphoma is significant in terms of prognosis and with selection of the type of therapy. Low grade lymphoma has a significantly better prognosis than high grade lymphoma.

In general, lymphoma is thought to be a "systemic" disease and is best treated with systemic chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is the recommended therapy for both high grade and low grade lymphoma and lymphoma is considered to be a very chemotherapy-responsive cancer. The chemotherapy protocols are quite different between the two forms because they behave very differently: low grade lymphoma is slow-growing and less aggressive than high grade lymphoma, therefore requiring less aggressive therapy as well. Oral chemotherapy treatments such as chlorambucil or cyclophosphamide are often used with low grade, indolent lymphoma. For the more aggressive, high grade lymphoma there are various protocol options that may include vincristine, vinblastine, cyclophosphamide, doxorubicin, lomustine, cytarabine, or other chemotherapy agents. Prednisolone steroid therapy is also often prescribed with both forms of this cancer.

The treatments and prognosis are also quite variable based upon the specific location of the lymphoma (ie. lymph nodes, GI, nasal, etc). More details on treatment options and prognosis can be discussed at a consultation specific to your pet's diagnosis and presentation.

Please remember that each patient is an individual and can have variable presentations of their cancer and response to treatment. Specific details and recommendations for your pet can be discussed in detail during a consultation with the oncologists at the Animal Cancer Center of Texas.