

Lumps & Bumps in our pets

Cancer! A term which can strike fear into our hearts and something which occurs throughout the animal kingdom. Many of us will have personal experiences with this, so when our pet develops a lump we often think the worst, but it is important to realise that not all lumps and swellings are life-threatening tumours. There are in fact dozens of types of lumps associated with the skin and many of these may be non-serious.



Even though the skin is the most common area for tumour occurrence in dogs (30% of all tumours in dogs affect the skin) and the second most common area in cats (approximately 20%), the majority of skin tumours are not cancerous. The problem we have as vets or owners is trying to tell which the important ones are and the key to a successful outcome in all cases is making an early and accurate diagnosis.

There is no reliable way to tell if a lump is benign or malignant based on physical appearances. "Our eyes are not microscopes". Taking a sample (biopsy) of the lump is generally required to assess how important or dangerous it is. Surgically removing some or all of the lump allows the pathologist to diagnose tumour type and the vet can then plan the most appropriate treatment. In many cases simply taking a few cells from a lump using a needle and syringe, something which can often be carried out during the course of a veterinary consultation without anaesthetic, can give a diagnosis. There is a great sense of relief associated with early diagnosis of benign lumps and, for more significant growths, early intervention based on diagnosis generally leads to a better outcome for the pet.

Too many times we have had dogs, cats, rabbits or other pets presented to us with one or more skin lumps where the owner had spent months and sometimes years worried that their beloved pet may have cancer. Sadly by the time these pets were first presented, their tumours were very challenging or impossible to cure. Often the growths were causing additional complications for the pet by then, such as difficulty with walking or toileting. Undoubtedly earlier diagnosis in most of these cases would have really helped the pets and cure would have been achievable. Earlier diagnosis means that treatments, if necessary, are generally simpler, less damaging, less expensive and more likely to prove successful. In other words, a happier outcome for pets and owners alike.

So, do your pet a favour. Don't delay booking a thorough check-up for your pet and, if your vet recommends diagnostic tests, remember that early, accurate diagnosis is the key to a successful outcome. We all want our pets to live long and healthy lives. Acting now can prevent future problems and worries.

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