

Haemangiosarcoma

What is Haemangiosarcoma?

Haemangiosarcoma is a type of cancer arising from the blood vessels. As blood vessels occur throughout the body, the cancer can also be found anywhere in the body. Common sites are the liver, spleen and heart. Some breeds of dog seem to be more at risk of developing haemangiosarcoma, such as German Shepherd Dogs, Golden Retrievers and English Setters. The blood vessels produced by this type of cancer are abnormal and tend to be weak. They can therefore leak or rupture. Rapid loss of blood can cause the animal to suffer from weakness and collapse. When these abnormal vessels do bleed, the cancer cells are released and can spread to other organs. Cancer cells can also spread inside the blood vessels to other organs. Animals with haemangiosarcoma often need a number of diagnostic tests to find out whether or not the cancer does seem to have spread throughout the body, and therefore what the most appropriate treatment is.

What treatment is possible?

Treatment for haemangiosarcoma often involves two approaches. Surgery can be performed to remove the primary tumour or to control bleeding, and chemotherapy can often be used to manage metastases (secondary tumours). Unfortunately, haemangiosarcoma is not curable. The goal of chemotherapy is to induce a 'remission' by killing most of the cancer cells. 'Remission' means that all the symptoms of the cancer have temporarily disappeared. Animals who are in complete remission appear normal by all tests. They have no masses or lumps and should be completely well in themselves. However it is important to note that some cancer cells do still survive and eventually these cells grow and the cancer becomes evident again. When this happens the animal is said to be out of remission.

Will my pet experience side effects with chemotherapy?

Some animals experience side effects with chemotherapy but these are generally mild and either resolve spontaneously or with minimal treatment. The clinician looking after your pet will always try to choose the drug or combination of drugs that will cause the fewest side effects, whilst being the most effective. The aim is that the pet should feel as well as possible and most patients do not seem to feel unwell whilst receiving chemotherapy. The potential for drug related side effects must always be balanced against the benefit of the chemotherapy and the consequences of the cancer itself.

What is the outlook (prognosis)?

Dogs with haemangiosarcoma affecting their internal organs, treated with surgery alone, live for an average of only 2 months. If there are no signs of metastasis (spread) at the time of surgery and chemotherapy is given as well, then the average (median) survival time increases to 6-10 months. Median survival means that half of the animals live for longer than this but half live for less time than this. Chemotherapy can improve quality of life and survival time for dogs who have secondary tumours (metastases) too.

The outlook is a little better for haemangiosarcoma involving the skin or the tissue just under the skin. For dogs with haemangiosarcoma under the skin, surgery alone can give a median survival of 6 months and for dogs with haemangiosarcoma of the skin (without spread to other organs) surgery can increase survival to 1.5 years, although new lesions can arise during this time.

This information sheet has been adapted from a client information sheet by Rosenberg in Ettinger's Textbook of Veterinary Internal Medicine, 5th edition



We are a multidisciplinary specialist referral practice for cats & dogs, near Winchester, Hampshire

t 01962 767920 e info@andersonmoores.com w www.andersonmoores.com