

Orthopaedics

Oncology

Medicine

Dermatology

Soft tissue surgery

Specialist Imaging

Cardiology

Anaesthesia

Neurology

Physiotherapy

Haemangiosarcoma

What is Haemangiosarcoma?

Haemangiosarcoma is a type of cancer arising from the blood vessels, therefore this, cancer can 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 shepherds, 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 inside the body can cause the animal to suffer from weakness, lethargy, pale gums 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. Most HSA (except some appearing in the skin) are both locally aggressive and have a high likelihood of spreading to other parts of the body.

Diagnosis and Screening Tests

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. Dogs in which the tumour ruptured into the abdomen often present as a surgical emergency. Prior to surgery, it is important to perform blood tests to evaluate blood cell numbers, blood clotting ability and organ function. Imaging (either X-rays of the chest, ultrasound of the abdomen or CT scan) will be performed as well to check for evidence of spread of the cancer, or other problems that may affect treatment decisions. Some dogs with haemangiosarcoma may require supportive care such as fluid therapy or blood transfusion prior to surgery.

What treatment is possible?

Treatment for haemangiosarcoma often involves 2 approaches. Surgery can be performed to remove the primary tumour or to control bleeding. The majority of dogs with haemangiosarcoma arising from a location other than the skin will develop spread (metastasis) in the future, therefore we usually recommend treatment with chemotherapy following surgery. 'Standard' chemotherapy typically consists of the injectable drug doxorubicin given once every 2-3 weeks for a total of four-six treatments, sometimes combined with other cytotoxic drugs. Following the completion of chemotherapy, regular rechecks, including repeat imaging are recommended. Despite these treatments, the long-term prognosis for dogs with haemangiosarcoma is generally poor. In some cases, where surgery is not feasible, we might recommend chemotherapy alone, with short-lasting responses in majority of the cases.

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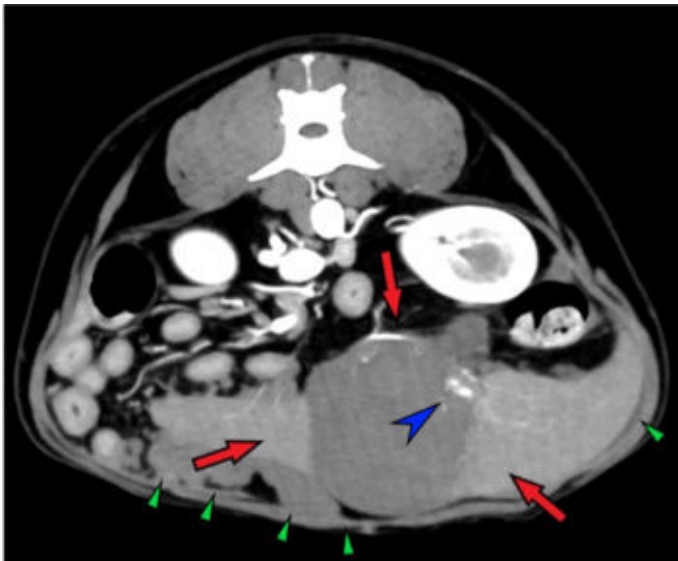
Will my pet experience side effects with chemotherapy?

Some animals experience side effects with chemotherapy but these are generally mild and either resolve spontaneously or with minimal treatment. Please see our chemotherapy brochure for more information.

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 at the time of surgery, and chemotherapy is given as well, then the median survival time increases to 6-10 months. Median survival means that 50% of the animals live for longer than this but 50% live for less time than this.

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.



CT scan of an abdomen in a dog with large, cavitory splenic mass (red arrows) showing a central feeding vessel (blue arrowhead) and concurrent presence of blood in the abdomen (green arrowheads).



CT scan of the chest in a dog with splenic hemangiosarcoma showing multiple soft tissue nodules (red arrows) representing pulmonary metastases (spread).

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