



What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy is the treatment of cancer with a drug or combination of drugs that kill rapidly dividing cells (including cancer cells).

When is chemotherapy indicated?

Chemotherapy is used to treat systemic cancers (cancers that involve the whole body) such as lymphoma. It can also be used to delay or prevent metastasis, or delay/prevent regrowth of a tumor that was removed. There are many different chemotherapy protocols (treatment regimens) depending on the cancer type. During your consultation appointment we will explain the different protocols as well as their effectiveness and side-effects for your pet's particular type of cancer.

How is chemotherapy administered?

Chemotherapy can be given intravenously; subcutaneously (under the skin); orally; into body cavities (called intracavitary); into the muscle (called intramuscular); or injected into the tumor site. The route of administration depends on the type of tumor we are treating. Generally, chemotherapy is given after an examination is performed and bloodwork is evaluated. Some chemotherapy drugs only take a few minutes to administer and others may take 30 minutes to several hours. Pets do typically go home by the end of the day.

What are the side effects of chemotherapy?

In general, chemotherapy is tolerated very well by dogs and cats. Side effects may include bone marrow suppression (decreased white blood cells) and gastrointestinal upset (vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite). Pets generally do not lose their hair during treatment, but regrowth of the hair may be slower than usual and fluffy dogs may lose more hair during chemotherapy. Some drugs have specific side effects (such as toxicity to the heart, kidneys, or liver). We check blood counts before every chemotherapy administration and depending on the drug being administered, we may check an electrocardiogram or kidney or liver blood values. Approximately 80% of patients have mild to no side effects, 10-20% have moderate side effects that are managed with medications and sometimes intravenous fluids or fluids under the skin. Rarely, 5% or fewer patients may require hospitalization.

If your pet gets ill, please let your oncologist know and we can try to assess whether to reduce the dose the next time or send home supportive medications with the next chemotherapy dose. Our primary goal is that your pet has a good quality of life throughout the chemotherapy treatments.

What is the treatment for chemotherapy side effects?

If your pet has a reaction to his or her chemotherapy, we may send home prescription medications to help minimize or prevent side effects in the future. Some of the medications are listed below. Talk to your oncologist to determine if your pet needs any of these medications.

Anti-nausea: Metoclopramide (Reglan), Maropitant (Cerenia), Ondansetron (Zofran), Dolasetron (Anzemet)

Anti-diarrheal antibiotics: Metronidazole, Tylan powder (Tylosin)

Antibiotics: Amoxicillin, Cephalexin, Trimethoprim-Sulfa

Appetite stimulants: Capromorelin, Mirtazapine, Cyproheptadine, Prednisone

(continued...)



Do I need to worry about my exposure to my pet after chemotherapy?

Depending on the drug given, chemotherapy or its metabolites may be in your pet's urine or feces for 72 hours or more after administration. It is recommended that you take some basic precautions during this period to minimize your exposure.

1. Accidental urination or defecation in the house should be cleaned up immediately. Wear gloves when cleaning feces and urine. Clean the floors with a detergent cleanser. If skin contact is made with urine or feces, wash skin with soap and water.
2. Keep children, pregnant women, and other pets away from areas where accidents have occurred.
3. Take your pet to eliminate outside in areas where other pets and children do not have access.