

What is lymphoma?

Lymphoma is a cancer of the white blood cells called lymphocytes. This type of cancer can involve different organs in the body, including lymph nodes, liver, spleen, bone marrow, or intestinal tract.

What are some of the symptoms of lymphoma?

One of the most common signs of lymphoma is enlarged lymph nodes. These lymph nodes can be found under the chin, in front of the shoulders, in the groin, and behind the knees. Other signs which are not specific for lymphoma may include lethargy, decreased appetite, vomiting, diarrhea, or nausea. Because lymphoma can affect any body part, symptoms will vary depending on the specific form of lymphoma in your pet.

What is the treatment for lymphoma?

Lymphoma is usually a systemic disease (involves the whole body), and therefore, treatment is aimed at the whole body. Because of this, localized therapies like surgery or radiation are infrequently recommended and [chemotherapy](#) is the treatment of choice. The most commonly used protocol involves weekly treatments using several drugs in combination, called the Wisconsin-Madison chemotherapy protocol. For the first two months, chemotherapy is given once weekly and for the following four months, it is every other week. Your oncologist will review the recommended treatment protocol in detail and will work with you to develop a plan that makes sense for you and your pet. There are many treatment protocols available for dogs and cats with lymphoma.

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, platelets, or red blood cells) and gastrointestinal upset (vomiting, diarrhea, decreased appetite). Pets generally do not lose all of their hair during treatment, but regrowth of the hair may be slower than usual and dogs with long hair coats may lose more hair during chemotherapy. Dogs with continuously growing haircoats (dogs that need to have haircuts like poodles, schnauzers, or Maltese) may have more dramatic temporary hair loss. 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, may recommend other specific tests such as an electrocardiogram, a cardiac ultrasound, or blood tests to evaluate organ function. Approximately 80% of patients have mild to no side effects and 10-20% may have moderate side effects that are easily managed with medications or fluid therapy. Our protocols are intentionally designed so that less than 5% of patients have severe side effects that may require hospitalization with potentially life-threatening complications.

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 to provide a good quality of life throughout the chemotherapy. Please see the [Chemotherapy](#) handout for more information.

How do you measure if my pet is in remission or responding to treatment?

Generally, if your pet was diagnosed with enlarged lymph nodes, we feel and measure the lymph nodes on physical examination to determine if there is remission. If your pet had lymphoma diagnosed in other areas (such as the spleen, liver, or lymph nodes in the abdomen), we may periodically check those organs with an abdominal ultrasound.

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What is the prognosis for pets with lymphoma?

Prognosis varies depending on the specific type of lymphoma your pet has. Although we are unable to cure your pet of its lymphoma, most lymphoma patients have a good chance of responding to chemotherapy. Your oncologist will discuss this more specific prognosis with you once they have evaluated your pet.