

## CANCER - It doesn't have to be a death sentence

The word "cancer" strikes fear in the heart of every pet owner. All of us have lost loved ones to cancer at one point or another, and many of us have watched them suffer through surgeries and chemotherapy treatments, only to succumb to the disease in the end. However, "cancer" should not be synonymous with "death". Many people and animals alike win the battle against cancer and go on to lead long and enjoyable lives.

### Early Detection

Just like with humans, early detection of a cancer is the best way to win the fight against it. The biggest danger with cancer is when it spreads, or "metastasizes", to vital organs like the heart or lungs. If we can catch the cancer before this happens, and quickly remove it, then there is no reason why your pet can't live for years and years after cancer.

### How to Catch Cancer Early:

- Routine checkups. Dogs and cats don't show signs of sickness from cancer until it becomes very advanced, so don't skip regular check ups. Vets can often spot early warning signs that family members don't recognize. Young adult pets should be seen once a year. Seniors should come for a visit every 6 months.
- Check new lumps and bumps. Many animals, especially certain breeds like Labradors, are prone to getting fatty lumps which are perfectly harmless. Unfortunately, the more dangerous kinds of lump often look very similar. So if you find a new bump on your fur-baby, don't panic, but do get it checked out, especially if it is growing quickly or seems painful to the touch. The vet can take a small cell sample with a needle and send it off to the lab to be looked at, and that can give us an idea of which lumps should come off, and which can stay.
- Routine testing in seniors. Even when your older pet seems perfectly healthy, it's a good idea to do routine bloodwork once every 6 to 12 months. While some cancers, such as lung cancer or brain cancer, will not show up on bloodwork (sadly there are no cancer marker tests for pets), vets can often spot suspicious irregularities, such as steadily rising liver values, odd-shaped white blood cells, or electrolyte imbalances, that prompt further diagnostics which will reveal the cancer. Tumors will show up on x-rays and ultrasounds, too.

### What Can Be Done:

- Surgery. The best way to get rid of cancer is to surgically remove it before it spreads to vital places like the lungs. Many owners are hesitant to pursue surgery, and if the cancer has spread there often isn't much point in putting a beloved pet through anesthesia and surgery. However, when caught early, surgery can be absolutely life-saving.
- Chemotherapy/referral to an oncologist. Yes, there are veterinary oncologists who specialize in treating cancer. If your pet has received a cancer diagnosis, you can ask your vet for a referral to the oncologist, who can go over your pet's options, including chemotherapy.
- Herbal/Nutritional/Medicinal support. Sadly, there is no magic herb which cures cancer. Cancer cells must be removed/killed in order to stop it from growing and spreading. However, herbal and nutritional support can help slow the growth or spread of the cancer, and help keep the pet's body healthy for as long as possible. Medications such as prednisone or pain medications can help relieve a pet's discomfort when nutritional/herbal support is no longer enough.

### What Should NOT Be Done:

- Supplementing with herbs without first discussing with a vet. Many people think of herbs as harmless, but if they were harmless, then that would mean that they didn't work. Herbs do have medicinal effects, and so they should be treated like medicine – do not take without first discussing with your doctor! For example, turmeric, a powerful anti-inflammatory, can actually counteract the effects of certain kinds of chemotherapy, radiation, and blood thinning therapies. It is important that all of the vets involved in treating your pet know what supplements you are giving, so they can advise you of any drug interactions or side effects.
- Laser therapy/acupuncture. In most cancer cases, laser therapy and acupuncture are not recommended, because they open up the body's lymphatic and circulatory systems which can actually help cancer travel to new locations! Talk to a veterinarian qualified in acupuncture before pursuing this option.
- Nothing. While it is okay to choose not to extend a pet's suffering with surgery and chemotherapy, you must remember that cancer can be painful and can be very hard on a pet's body. If you choose to pursue palliative care, please do so with veterinary help so your pet's last days, months or years can be as comfortable as possible.

## SURGERY - When to Pursue

If your pet has been diagnosed with a cancer, chances are you will be given the option to have it surgically removed. When it is a small lump on your pet's side, this isn't too scary. But sometimes it involves taking part of your pet's body with it, such as a limb or even an internal organ.

Many owners balk when they hear the word "amputation". They feel that removing a leg, or a spleen, or even a jaw bone, sounds too horrific. It is important to remember that animals don't think and feel about amputations the same we do. A dog who has had a leg removed won't lie around feeling depressed about it. All the dog wants is to be able to go for a walk. They don't look at themselves in the mirror and reflect on what has happened to them. Pets live in the moment, and for this we are very grateful. We have seen patients go through surgeries that humans would find very distressing without any trouble at all. They adjust to their new life circumstances and keep looking forward to the next bowl of food!

Removing a cancer – before it spreads – is the number one best way to get rid of cancer. A day of surgery and a week or two of recovery can add months and years to your pet's life, and sometimes relieve them of terrible pain. Sometimes, however, the cancer has already spread to inoperable areas, like the lungs. Sometimes the cancer is too advanced to justify the stress, discomfort, and expense. If that is the case, the vet will advise you. Veterinarians want to make their patients more comfortable, and extend their lives. We will never recommend unnecessary suffering.

### Referral to an Oncologist

If your pet's cancer diagnosis is complex, or you feel unsure about which option would be best for your pet, we can always refer you to a veterinary oncologist. This cancer specialist will be able to look at your pet's case and give you all of the options available to you – and make a recommendation. Sometimes our clients are told that surgery would be very invasive with very little chance of success. Other times our clients are told that they have a very good chance of getting rid of the cancer with some surgery or chemotherapy. Once you have heard the options and recommendations, you will be free to make the choice that feels right for you and your family.

## TRUE STORY: Maverick

When Maverick, an 8 year old Great Dane, first started limping, his owners didn't think much of it.

*"Maverick has always been a rough and tumble kind of boy. Just that week he had jumped at the fence to try and see over, but failed miserably. We figured he had stumbled or tripped and hurt himself."*

They brought him in to Healing Paws to get checked out, but they never expected to hear the word "cancer". When we gave them the bad news, they thought for sure that it was the end. At eight, large breed dogs like Maverick are already considered seniors. We presented Maverick's family with two options: amputation of his front leg, followed by chemotherapy, or palliative comfort care with herbal, nutritional and medicinal support. At first, Maverick's family leaned toward the 2nd option.

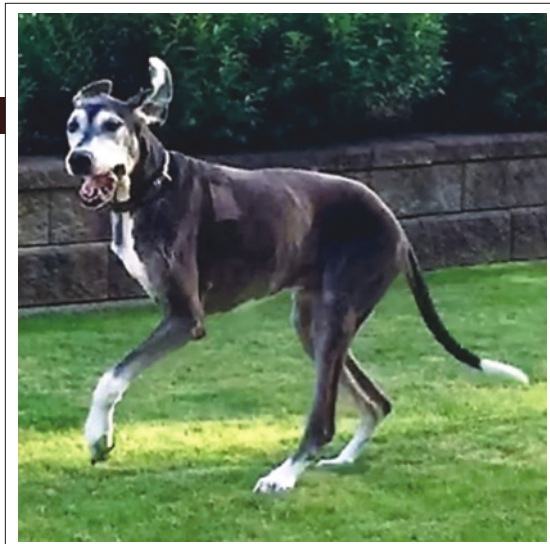
*"Of course we wanted as much time as possible with Maverick, but amputation and chemotherapy worried us in terms of how much pain and suffering it would bring - especially considering his size, age and already-arthritic joints."*

Maverick was placed on some immune-boosting supplements, had his diet altered, and was given pain control. But as time went on and the pain worsened, Maverick's family began to re-think their initial feelings about amputation.

*"Maverick was now taking pain medication every day and he wasn't even walking on the affected leg. However, at our follow up with Healing Paws, he still didn't show any signs of the cancer spreading. We knew we had to do something. The pain was causing Maverick not to be Maverick anymore. He seemed down all the time and it was clear that the sadness from the pain would likely get him before the cancer did. This was when we decided to amputate."*

And so, Maverick's leg was removed, and to everyone's relief, he thrived.

*"By the end of the first week, we knew we had made the right decision. We saw our boy becoming himself again. Maverick has adjusted to life on three legs perfectly. He goes for his walks to the park and the pet store just as he did before. He can run and jump like he did before and is even playing with his doggy sister again. Since the surgery, he has even learned to swim and goes to do laps every Sunday. Most importantly, Maverick is Maverick again and that is all we wanted. We have been so lucky to have an entire year with him, that initially we didn't think was possible. I know Maverick's stubbornness has something to do with it, but we couldn't have come this far without all of the great people at Healing Paws. They have treated Maverick, and us, like part of the family and we have never worried that they would do anything less than what's best for him."*



## CANCER COMFORT CARE

There are many cancer success stories out there, but sometimes the cancer is too advanced, or has spread too far, to be able to save the patient. Sometimes the available options, such as surgery, are beyond the financial means of the family, or simply don't make sense given the age and health of their beloved pet.

If you choose to pursue palliative care, we can help you give your pet the best possible life in the days ahead, and help you make choices about how and when to say goodbye.

### Comfort Care Support

- Herbal Supplements – No herb can cure cancer, but many herbs can help boost the patient's immune system or suppress cancer growth to help give your pet the best possible tools with which to fight the cancer's growth and spread, or can counteract the cancer's effects (for example, a supplement which supports the liver for a patient living with liver cancer), thus giving your pet the longest possible life and keeping your pet feeling healthy for as long as possible.
- Nutritional Support – We can advise you on the best choice for food for your pet, including helping you prepare home cooked food if you choose to pursue that route. No diet can kill or shrink a cancer, but by choosing ingredients wisely we can at least avoid feeding the cancer and helping it grow!
- Medicinal Support – When the effects of a cancer begin to affect your pet's quality of life, medications such as steroids and pain control can help your pet feel better for longer. We can advise you on what medications would be suitable for your pet's situation.
- Advice on when to say goodbye – The most common question we hear from owners of terminal cancer patients is, "How do I know when it's time?" While there is no easy answer, we like to remind our clients that a gentle death is our final gift to a beloved pet. When your pet no longer seems to be enjoying life, it is time to start preparing yourself and your family to give that gift. If you ask us whether we think it is time, we can give you objective advice, but ultimately this is a decision that is very personal and must be made by you. Feel free to ask us questions in advance about the euthanasia process, after care, cost, and other considerations, to help reduce additional stress from making these decisions at the last minute, so your final goodbye can be as smooth and gentle as possible.



## TRUE STORY: ZOEY

Zoey, a senior Wheaten Terrier, loves going to doggy daycare and it was the staff there who first told her owner that she had a lump in her mouth.

*"Cancer was the first thing that came to mind," said her owner, Karen. Sadly, it was indeed a cancer, and so Zoey's family was faced with a near-impossible decision: Either lose their dog to a painful and aggressive cancer, or try to save her - by surgically removing her lower jaw. "I was devastated. I think I was numb for a couple of days."*

There was more bad news – even if they did want to remove Zoey's jaw, the surgery wouldn't come cheap. It was major surgery that would need to be performed by a specialist at a specialty hospital, and it came with a corresponding price tag.

As expensive as it was, Karen desperately wanted to do everything she could to save Zoey, who once saved her own life. Besides, ***"She had always been so healthy and full of life."*** If they could only get rid of that cancer, there was a chance that Zoey would live for years. Besides, as drastic as the surgery sounded, the experts involved all reassured Karen that Zoey would be quite happy without her lower jaw, although she would likely need to eat a liquid diet.

So, Zoey's family pulled together, and with some financial help from Karen's brother, Zoey's cancer – and her jaw – was removed.

Today, Zoey is doing great, and is an inspiration to everyone who meets her. Her furry beard hides her missing jaw, so if you meet her, you simply might think that she is a normal dog with a long and happy tongue.

*"Zoey is as cheeky as ever, and climbs on the counter if I'm not looking. She has even figured out how to eat hard food and treats, but she prefers the pureed soups and stews I cook for her."*

Karen has no regrets about her decision. "Never look back," she says, and Zoey certainly seems to agree!





## MAGIC MUSHROOMS?

No, we aren't talking about that kind of magic mushrooms! The world of fungus is large and varied, but studies have found several types of mushroom that have powerful effects on the immune system, and may be able to protect against and suppress cancer cells.

**Enoki Mushrooms**, sometimes called Golden Needle Mushrooms or Lily Mushrooms, and are often used in East Asian cuisine. Enoki mushrooms contain powerful anti-oxidants like ergothioneine which boost the immune system and help remove the free radicals which cause cancer. The stalk also contains a large amount of a protein called FIP-5 which helps regulate the immune system. Cancer rates are lower in areas of Japan where Enoki mushrooms are cultivated, and in 2009 the journal Immunology published a research trial which found that mice injected with the cancer-causing Human Papilloma Virus were less likely to develop cancer if they were given extracts from Enoki mushrooms. Another study in 2010 found that the beta glucans molecules contained in Enoki mushrooms boosted the part of the immune system which locates and destroys diseased cells. Studies continue to be conducted on the benefits of Enoki mushrooms, but so far there is good evidence that they can help prevent cancer and boost the immune system to help fight cancer cells.

**Reishi Mushrooms** are one of the oldest fungi to be used medicinally, as records in China indicate that it has been prescribed for over 2,000 years. Scientists are now just beginning to understand its effect on the immune system, and while research has mostly been preliminary, there is good reason to believe that Reishi Mushrooms would make an excellent addition to any anti-cancer diet.

Like Enoki mushrooms, Reishi mushrooms contain beta glucans, which boost the immune system in defending against cancer. Several test-tube studies have found that Reishi mushrooms inhibited the growth of breast cancer and colorectal cancer cells. Another study done in live mice found that Reishi mushroom reduced the spread of lung cancer. There have been no large studies in larger animals or humans yet.

### Can Mushrooms Really Cure Cancer?

As much as we wish that we could cure cancer with a nutritional supplement, there just isn't any evidence to support such a claim. However, we have good reason to include these mushrooms in cancer support therapies, to slow down the spread of the cancer and help the body to fight it as best as it can.

## TRUE STORY: KIKKO

When Kikko's owner noticed a small lump on her elderly Cavalier King Charles' leg, she didn't worry too much. She knew that older dogs are prone to lumps and bumps. But, being a conscientious owner, she brought Kikko in to us to have the lump checked out. We weren't too concerned either, at first. But, since the lump seemed to be on or near the lymph node, we recommended having it removed and tested to be sure that there was nothing to worry about. Unfortunately, there was something to worry about. Kikko's lump was an aggressive form of lymphoma.

**"I started googling immediately,"** owner confessed. What she learned was not encouraging – dogs diagnosed with Kikko's kind of cancer had an average life expectancy listed in terms of months. The good news was that so far, only one lymph node seemed to be affected, and there was no sign that the cancer had spread. But the form of lymphoma is so aggressive that we warned Kikko's mom that it is virtually inevitable that the cancer will eventually take hold somewhere else. We discussed the option of sending Kikko to an oncologist for chemotherapy. A

course of chemotherapy might be able to kill off the remaining cancer cells in Kikko's body, but nothing was guaranteed. Kikko's owner decided not to pursue chemotherapy. Kikko, at the age of ten, had already achieved the average life expectancy for her breed.

**"If she were younger, I wouldn't have hesitated,"** she says. **"And she's such a homebody. Kikko would hate having to make trip after trip to a big veterinary hospital for treatments. I decided not to put her through all of that."**

Although she knows that Kikko's cancer will resurface eventually, her mom dedicated herself to putting off that day for as long as possible, without resorting to chemotherapy. Dr Maja helped her formulate a home cooked diet designed to help feed Kikko's body, without feeding the cancer. This includes Enoki mushrooms, which Kikko's mom learned, are used in Japan to help suppress the progression of lymphoma, and an herbal tincture called Tumor X, which contains several different herbs known to help suppress cancer growth.

**"The cancer is in her; I know nothing can change that,"** says Kikko's mom. **"But I want to keep her healthy for as long as possible."**

Kikko comes to Healing Paws regularly to have her lymph nodes and lymphocytes checked, and after nearly a year, she is still cancer-free! Owner is very happy with her decision, and in the meantime is enjoying every day she has with Kikko.

