



www.vcsnewengland.com
(508) 276-0836



Veterinary Cancer
Specialists
of New England

Taking Care of Your Pet During Chemotherapy

The goal of chemotherapy is to kill cancer cells while maintaining a good quality of life for your pet. And while dogs and cats typically tolerate chemotherapy well—much better than human cancer patients—if unexpected, severe side effects occur we will change the treatment plan. We may try different drugs, doses or schedule to provide a good quality of life for your pet.

Blood count monitoring

It's common for chemotherapy drugs to lower your cat or dog's white blood cell and platelet counts, which makes them more susceptible to infection. We may recommend that your pet have a complete blood count (CBC) and platelet count performed at certain times after treatment—typically 7-10 days after treatment but can vary based on the specific drug given—to determine that the counts don't drop too low. If the white blood cell count becomes low, we may prescribe an antibiotic as a precaution.



Managing mild side effects at home

It's important to monitor your pet carefully, especially for two to five days after treatment. As long as he or she is drinking normally and moderately active, any mild side effects—like vomiting less than three times a day, mild diarrhea, decreased or finicky appetite, or a drop in energy—can be managed at home. For upset stomachs, try bland foods like rice, pasta, boiled chicken or hamburger, or low-fat cottage cheese in small meals several times a day. Encourage your pet to lick ice chips and drink small amounts of water several times a day, rather than drinking a whole bowl of water at one time. If needed, we can prescribe oral medications for vomiting and diarrhea. If you have any concerns, please call us for recommendations.

Veterinary care for severe side effects

It is not common, but for some pets side effects of chemotherapy are severe and can even become life-threatening. Dehydration is one major concern, so if more fluid is leaving your pet (through vomiting or diarrhea) than your pet is taking in (through drinking/food), then your pet may require intravenous fluids. If your cat or dog is experiencing severe vomiting or diarrhea—especially that persist for a day or more; profound lack of energy and decreased activity; and, fever of greater than 103° (rectally), a veterinarian should examine your pet. Dry or sticky gums or loss of skin elasticity are signs of dehydration. Also, if your pet develops a low white blood cell count and/or an infection, intravenous antibiotics and fluids may be required until the infection is controlled and/or the blood count improves.



Protect the people around your pet

It is safe for your pet to be around people and other animals following treatment, however, because most chemotherapeutic drugs are harmful to normal cells as well as cancer cells, we encourage you to limit human exposure to the drugs.

Many chemotherapy agents are eliminated from the pet's body in urine or feces or through vomiting (after taking an oral medication). You can minimize human exposure by encouraging your pet to urinate and defecate on well drained surfaces such as grass. Wear gloves when picking up pet waste. If your pet urinates or defecates on bedding, you should wash it separately from other items. If your pet vomits after administration of oral medications, wear gloves when cleaning up and wash your hands well after cleaning.

If you are giving your pet oral chemotherapy at home, such as cyclophosphamide (Cytoxan), Chlorambucil (Leukeran) or CCNU (Lomustine), wear gloves and wash your hands well after handling the drug. Do not open capsules, crush or split tablets in order to administer them to your pet. Pregnant women and children should not handle or administer the medications to pets.