



The Basics of Cancer

The first step in dealing with cancer is understanding the basics—how we talk about it, evaluate it, and treat it. We will answer any question you have—there are no silly questions—but if you want to get a headstart, we have outlined some basics below.

Cancer terminology

Cancer, which can also be called **malignancy** or **neoplasia**, refers to uncontrolled and purposeless growth of cells. Since this growth can happen anywhere in the body, there are many types of cancer—it is not a single disease.

The first thing you might have heard is that your cat or dog has a **tumor**. A tumor is a general word that refers to that abnormal growth, which creates a swelling inside the body. Once we conduct a full examination of your pet and the tumor, we can determine whether it is **benign**, which we describe as good cancer, or if it is **malignant**, which is bad cancer.

Malignant cancer has the ability to **metastasize**, which means it can spread to other spots anywhere else in the body. A metastasis can happen when cancer cells get into the blood or

lymph vessels, which will carry them to other organs. Benign cancer does not metastasize and is not invasive, but depending on where on the body it occurs, it can cause serious problems for your cat or dog just by its growth.

Oncology is the branch of medicine dedicated to the study of cancer. Dr. Abbo is an **oncologist**, so his job is to help you understand your pet's diagnosis and work with you to make decisions about treatment.



Evaluating your pet

Our first priority is to assess the extent of the cancer, which is a process we call tumor staging. This will help us understand your cat or dog's prognosis—the expected outcome based on what we know about his or her cancer today—formulate a treatment plan, and then evaluate your pet's response to the treatment.

Tumor staging usually includes: blood tests, like a complete blood count (CBC) to evaluate red and white blood cells and platelets, a chemistry profile to evaluate your pet's organ function, a urinalysis, radiographs—x-rays to evaluate possible metastasis to the lungs, and tissue aspirate and/or biopsy. It's possible that we may repeat a test your primary veterinarian has performed because of the changing nature of your pet's cancer.

For some patients we will recommend additional testing procedures that may include an ultrasound of the abdomen and/or chest, specialized radiologic studies like a CT/MRI scan, contrast studies or nuclear scan, bone marrow aspiration, lymph node aspirate, endoscopy (a direct examination of the stomach, colon or bronchi with a specialized scope), and immunologic studies. We are very thorough, however medicine is not an exact science, so even with all these staging procedures, it is possible that a small tumor may not be detected.

Once the tumor staging is complete we will understand your pet's cancer better so we can discuss your goals, treatment options, and possible outcomes for each option.

Cancer therapy

Our treatment options for your cat or dog's cancer may include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or a combination of one or more of those therapies. Chemotherapy may be administered in several ways, such as an injection under the skin, orally, delivered into the vein (IV) or into the tumor. Generally, radiation therapy is a local treatment since the dose is delivered directly to the tumor region and spares other tissues, which means fewer side effects.

Of course, due to the rarity or behavior of a tumor, a precise treatment may not be known. You may be offered the option to enroll your pet in an investigative clinical trial, which is an opportunity for clinicians to learn more about that treatment, which could possibly help humans and other pets as well as hopefully providing a benefit to your cat or dog. Ultimately, our recommendation will be based on both the tumor staging and our discussions with you.