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Chemotherapy for Pets: What You Need to Know

What Is Chemotherapy and How Does It Work?

Chemotherapy involves the use of medications to kill or slow the growth of cancer cells. It is often used when surgery alone cannot remove all of the cancer or when there is a risk of the disease spreading. Many chemotherapy drugs are derived from natural sources such as plants, roots, and even bacteria.

Making the Right Decision

Chemotherapy in animals is very different from human chemotherapy. While many people associate chemotherapy with hair loss, nausea, and poor quality of life, our goal in veterinary medicine is different: We aim to control or eliminate cancer while maintaining a high quality of life.

The medications used are the same as in human medicine, but at lower doses, which greatly reduces the risk and severity of side effects. Our aim is remission—meaning the cancer is no longer causing symptoms—rather than a complete cure.

Is It Selfish to Treat My Pet?

Absolutely not. Choosing to treat your pet is an act of love and commitment. If treatment offers the chance to slow or stop the cancer and maintain your pet's comfort and well-being, then it is a decision made in your pet's best interest.

What If I Can't Afford Treatment?

We understand that cost is a concern. We will work with you to develop a treatment plan tailored to your values and budget. Flexible and reasonable payment plans are available.

How Is Chemotherapy Administered?

Chemotherapy may be given in two ways:

- **Injection:** Administered into a vein via a catheter. A light bandage is placed after treatment and can be removed in 1-2 hours.
- **Oral tablets:** Given at home. Please do not crush, split, or open the pills.

If your pet is receiving oral chemotherapy:

- Wear gloves when handling pills (we will provide them).
- Wash your hands thoroughly afterward.
- Store the medication safely out of reach of children and pets.

Watch for side effects at the injection site such as redness or excessive licking beyond 24 hours. If this occurs, contact us immediately.

How Long Does Treatment Last?

Chemotherapy protocols vary depending on the type of cancer and your pet's response. Treatments may be given:

- Daily
- Weekly
- Every 2-4 weeks

This is usually followed by a monitoring phase. Long-term, continuous chemotherapy is rare, but in advanced cases, it may be used for as long as it remains effective.

Is There Any Risk to Me?

There is minimal risk of exposure, small concentrations are in your pet's urine or feces for 48 hours after treatment.

Precautions include:

- Wearing gloves when cleaning up accidents
 - Using disposable cleaning items (e.g. paper towels)
 - Washing hands thoroughly afterward
 - Soiled clothing or bedding should be washed twice in hot water or discarded
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What Are the Side Effects?

Most pets (80%) experience minimal to no side effects.

When they do occur, they are typically mild and short-lived.

Possible side effects may include:

- Decreased appetite
- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Fatigue
- Mild increase in infection risk

Hair loss (alopecia) is rare in dogs, except in breeds with continuously growing coats (e.g. Poodles, Old English Sheepdogs). Cats may lose their whiskers, but rarely their fur.

We carefully select drug types and doses to minimize side effects, and we routinely perform blood and urine tests to ensure your pet is healthy enough to continue treatment.

Will Chemotherapy Cure My Pet's Cancer?

In many cases, chemotherapy controls cancer rather than cures it. It can place the cancer into remission, meaning your pet may feel and act completely normal.

Over time, some cancer cells may survive and multiply again. If this happens, we often change the drug protocol. However, resistance can develop over time, and eventually, treatment options may become limited. If that point is reached, we will focus on comfort and quality of life.

What Does Chemotherapy Cost?

The cost depends on your pet's treatment protocol. On average, each treatment may cost \$400-\$600, with the

number and frequency of treatments varying based on the cancer type and response. We will always provide you with an individualized cost estimate.

Can My Pet Be Vaccinated During Chemotherapy?

Yes, it is generally safe to vaccinate pets during chemotherapy. While the response to vaccines may be slightly reduced, there is no increased risk of adverse reactions. For non-urgent cases, we recommend delaying vaccines for about 2 months post-treatment, unless your pet is entering a high-risk environment such as a kennel or cattery.

We're here to support you and your pet every step of the way.

If you have questions, need clarification, or would like to schedule a consultation, please don't hesitate to contact us.