

# Mast Cell Tumors in Cats and Dogs

*A brief guide on disease progression including end-of-life symptoms*

## Common Signs of Pain

- Panting
- Lameness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Pacing
- Abnormal posture
- Body tensing
- Poor grooming habits
- Tucked tail
- Dilated pupils
- Licking sore spot
- Muscle atrophy
- Decreased appetite
- Vocalizing/yowling
- Reclusive behavior
- Aggressive behavior
- Avoiding stairs/jumping
- Depressed
- Unable to stand

*Before your pet's condition becomes unmanageable or they are losing quality of life, it is important to begin end-of-life care discussions. Learn about pet hospice care and/or euthanasia services in your area so you are prepared for what lies ahead.*

## What is it?

Mast cells are specialized cells within the body that respond to inflammation and allergies by releasing biological chemicals such as histamine, heparin, serotonin, and prostaglandins. Mast Cell Tumors (MCT) are formed when there is an increased proliferation of these cells that are not controlled by normal mechanisms. These malignancies are occasionally capable of releasing an excessive amount of chemicals, causing systemic problems that include gastric ulcers, internal bleeding, and a variety of allergic manifestations. Tumors arise primarily on the skin, but can be found within the oral cavity, larynx, trachea, chest, and gastrointestinal tract. Cancerous spread usually occurs within the lymph nodes, spleen, and liver.

## How is it treated?

Treatment is dependent on the Grade (degree of malignancy on biopsy) of the disease and the predicted aggressive behavior of the tumor. The higher the grade, the more aggressive and more advanced the cancer. Treatments include surgical excision of the tumor, radiation therapy, chemotherapies, and supportive care. For some Grades, a gastrointestinal protectant should be administered to combat gastric ulceration.

## What is the prognosis for a mast cell tumor?

Prognosis for MCT is directly related to the site of growth and tumor stage and Grade. Complete removal of a Grade I tumor usually results in an excellent prognosis. Dogs that are tumor-free after 6 months are considered unlikely to have a recurrence. Primary tumors that originate in areas other than the skin tend to be more aggressive. Mast cell tumors of the prepuce, groin, nail bed, and oral regions are generally the most malignant. Tumors of bone marrow or internal organs/tissue have a particularly grave prognosis. Pets showing systemic signs and those whose tumors return after surgical removal also have a poor prognosis. Similarly, the faster the growth of the tumor, the more critical the case. A personalized treatment plan is important to slow the progression of MCT. Talk to your veterinarian regarding the best treatment protocol for your pet.

## What symptoms can present as the disease progresses?

### EARLY STAGES:

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Ulcerating mass
- Delayed wound healing
- Lethargy
- Licking the mass or lesion
- Vomiting/diarrhea

*\*If your pet vocalizes due to pain or anxiety, please consult with your tending veterinarian immediately.*

### LATE STAGES:

- Persistent early stages
- Abdominal pain
- Reclusive behavior, depression
- Gastric ulcers
- Exercise intolerance
- Difficulty breathing
- Coughing
- Bleeding disorders
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Severe weight loss
- Unable to rise

### CRISIS:

*Immediate veterinary assistance needed regardless of the disease*

- Difficulty breathing
- Prolonged seizures
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden collapse
- Profuse bleeding – internal or external
- Crying/whining from pain\*