

Nasal Tumors in Dogs

A Brief Guide • Part of the Educational Pet Disease Series from Lap of Love

Signs & Symptoms

Initial Symptoms

- Nasal bleeding
- Sneezing
- Weight loss
- Nasal discharge
- Bulging eye(s)
- Snoring

Intermediate Symptoms

- Lethargy
- Enlarged lymph nodes
- Facial Deformity
- Dental disease
- Nasal Ulceration
- Bad breath
- Noisy Breathing

Advanced Symptoms

- Reclusive behavior
- Decreased appetite
- Nausea/vomiting
- Hanging their head low
- Eye discharge/squinting
- Personality changes
- Mental stupor (rare)
- Seizures (rare)

Crisis Situations Requiring Immediate Medical Intervention

- Severe uncontrollable bleeding
- Difficulty breathing/Excessive panting
- Blue gums and/or tongue
- Sudden collapse
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Seizures (rare)

What Is It?

Nasal tumors account for approximately 1% of all tumors in dogs, of which 80% are estimated to be malignant, locally invasive cancers. While the percentage of metastasis found at diagnosis is low despite local invasion of surrounding tissue, at the time of death metastasis is reported as high as 45-50%. Nasal cancer, categorized by the location of growth, can affect the nasal planum (top of the nose) and the nasal cavities (inside the nose). The most common forms are squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and adenocarcinomas. All dogs are susceptible to nasal tumors but long-nosed breeds such as Dachshunds and those exposed to air toxins such as smoke and kerosene are over-represented.

Diagnosis

Due to the ability of the nasal tumor to hide and grow without causing significant symptoms, such as nose bleeds, facial deformity, and bulging of typically one eye, early detection is difficult. Often, as the early symptoms mimic common illnesses such as a cold, antibiotics may provide temporary relief though the tumor is the undiagnosed cause. Once advanced symptoms are noticed, further investigation of a nasal tumor should be pursued. Common diagnostic tests and procedures include bloodwork and urinalysis, a sedated oral exam, x-rays, a nasal scope, and nasal biopsy under anesthesia. Additional diagnostics include lymph node biopsies, MRI, and a CT scan to determine possible spread, a definitive diagnosis, and plan for possible treatment.

Treatment and Management

Treatment is generally focused on either short term pain and symptom palliation, or attempting to chronically manage the tumor through aggressive therapy. A complete cure is blunted by the close proximity of important sensitive structures (eyes, mouth, brain) that may be in harm's way if surgery and radiation are too aggressive. However, radiation remains the primary choice of therapy, often applied over several weeks. Chemotherapy alone is relatively unsuccessful but used in more experimental trials, often with radiation. Significant side effects, such as ulceration of the mouth, pain, and infection are possible. With the exception of advanced treatments, pain management, infection control with antibiotics and other palliative and hospice options are possible. This is often achieved with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, opioids, neurological pain medication, and topical and intra-nasal treatment. Antibiotics, steroids, anti-histamines, medicated creams and sprays can all help provide temporary relief in specific situations.

Prognosis

Nasal cancers that have responded to targeted radiation therapy have the best prognosis with an average survival time of 6 months to a year and a half. Unfortunately, even with successful remission, most dogs will experience recurrence. The presence of consistent nasal bleeding and metastatic disease quickly worsens the prognosis to an average 3-6 months with or without treatment.



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continued from page 1

Without any treatment, the prognosis is guarded and expected survival time is 1-3 months. Several experimental options such as chemotherapy combined with radiation, freezing the tumor, and others have shown promise in small groups but tend to be expensive and lack research. Consult with your veterinarian and a veterinary oncologist to learn all your options and construct a comprehensive individualized plan for your dog.

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Management Tips

Consider providing:

- Easily accessible food and water
- Standing level food/water dishes
- Access to safe quiet areas
- Warm, soft sleeping areas
- Natural calming products
- Canned food over kibble
- A harness to relieve neck pressure
- Artificial tears

Try to:

- Be consistent with medication
- Proactively manage pain
- Track appetite, weight, energy etc.
- Track the good days vs. the bad
- Limit stress (kids, noise)
- Use gentle handling at all times
- Groom around the face and eyes
- Have supplies for nose bleeds
- Use a medicated salve/powder from your veterinarian for skin sores
- Use a bulb syringe and/or saline wipes to clear nostrils
- Provide humidity in dry weather
- Protect ulcerated/raw areas from sun
- Limit odors, fumes, smoke etc.
- Avoid muzzles

Before your pet's condition becomes unmanageable or their quality of life starts to decline, 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.