

Oral Tumors in Dogs

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

Signs & Symptoms

Initial Symptoms

- Bleeding from the mouth
- Dental disease
- Nausea, vomiting
- Turning away from food
- Stops chewing, drops food
- Lack of grooming

Intermediate Symptoms

- Bad breath
- Weight loss
- Drooling, salivation
- Lethargic, unwilling to play
- Stops chewing on treats/toys

Advanced Symptoms

- Facial deformity
- Jaw deformity
- Head shy
- Pain upon opening mouth
- Quiet or clingy behavior
- Stops giving kisses

Crisis Situations Requiring Immediate Medical Intervention

- Difficulty breathing/panting
- Unable to walk
- Blue gums and/or tongue
- Sudden collapse
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Crying or whining in pain

What Is It?

Oral tumors are commonly diagnosed cancers in dogs; They are defined as a tumor that arises from the teeth, bone, tongue, back of the throat, or soft tissues of the upper and lower jaw. Canine oral tumors account for approximately 7-10% of all tumors reported in dogs. Most canine oral tumors are malignant (cancerous), though a small percentage are benign, (non-cancerous). Squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) and melanomas are the majority of documented oral tumors. Other possible malignant tumors include osteosarcoma, mast cell tumor, and fibrosarcoma. Typically, a mass is found within the oral cavity or extending from the oral cavity in conjunction with other symptoms noticed at home. Common symptoms can include drooling/increased salivation, dropping food/difficult eating, losing weight, vomiting, significant dental disease, inappropriate loss of healthy teeth, bad breath, bloody saliva, facial deformities, bulging of the eyes, and nasal discharge including mucous and sporadic blood from one of both nostrils.

Diagnosis

A presumptive diagnosis can be reached generally with a physical examination during which sometimes a mass may be noticed in or around the oral cavity, and reported symptoms at home. Preliminary diagnostics include a broad base of bloodwork, urinalysis, oral exam (often under sedation or anesthesia), and x-rays of the chest and skull. If an abnormal area or mass is found, cytological analysis (microscopic examination of the cells), or preferably, biopsy of the mass and nearby lymph nodes is recommended for a definitive diagnosis. Once the oral tumor has been diagnosed, assuming it is malignant, advanced diagnostics are recommended to help "stage" the tumor (provide information about size, location, severity, and spread) to direct treatment, planning, and prognosis. Advanced imaging, such as computed tomography (CT) scans, MRI, abdominal ultrasound, and screening other areas for metastasis (spread of the cancer to other parts of the body), are often performed in preparation of treatment.

Treatment and Management

Treatment is centered around palliation or aggressive therapy. Surgery is the primary recommendation for oral tumors, benign or malignant, if possible to reduce the size of the mass and potentially aim for a cure, though some of these options are invasive. Additional treatments with radiation, chemotherapy, and immunotherapy are helpful but are sometimes limited by the location and type of the tumor. Additional radiation at the site of surgery may be necessary for residual cancerous cells that were unable to be surgically removed. Chemotherapy is not considered beneficial for fibrosarcomas, as they tend to be resistant to the medications. Pain medications, soft food, feeding tubes, appetite stimulants, antibiotics, steroids, and other palliative medications are employed on a case by case basis to help control the overall comfort of the dog.

Prognosis

The prognosis for canine oral tumors depends on the type, malignancy, size, location, extent of local invasion and metastasis, as well as the concurrent disease status of the pet. Early detection regardless of the type of tumor presents a better prognosis, as does utilizing a board certified veterinary surgeon for any decided upon surgical procedure. Fibrosarcomas tend to be locally aggressive but rarely



LapofLove.com

Content may not be reproduced without written consent from Lap of Love International, Inc.

Continued

Oral Tumors in Dogs

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

continued from page 1

metastasize. They are fairly resistant to chemotherapy, and therefore radiation and surgery are the primary options for a fair to decent prognosis. Melanoma, a common oral cancer diagnosis, fortunately responds well to surgery and radiation in as many as 75% of the dogs reported. Have a detailed discussion with your veterinarian, a veterinary oncologist, and a veterinary surgeon regarding the best options for your dog.

LapofLove.com

Content may not be reproduced without written consent from Lap of Love International, Inc.

Management Tips

Consider providing:

- Easily accessible water
- Consistently measure meals
- Wet food only to decrease oral pain
- Elevated feeding dishes for large dogs
- Room temp. water to avoid oral pain
- A prescription moist high calorie food

Try to:

- Be consistent with medications
- Have your dog's teeth cleaned often
- Always have a yearly examination
- Touch your dog's mouth often to be able to examine when needed
- Do not smoke around your pet
- Meal feed, not free feed, your dog to monitor, appetite and eating behavior
- Brush your dog's teeth and pay close attention to overall oral hygiene
- Track appetite, urination, drinking, weight, vomiting, diarrhea, energy, etc.
- Limit stress (kids, noise)
- Keep up with preventative care
- Address concerns ASAP

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.