

Your Cat

CANCER



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It has pioneered many breakthroughs in relation to improving the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of animal disease and injury and is entirely dedicated to improving the health and welfare of cats, dogs and horses.

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This leaflet has been produced collaboratively with the Feline Advisory Bureau.

The Feline Advisory Bureau is a charity dedicated to the health and welfare of cats.

For further information please log-on to:
www.fabcats.org



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Animal *Health* Trust
the science behind animal welfare

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What is it and what are the common cancers in cats?

What is cancer?

The term 'cancer' is used to describe 'malignant' tumours (a collection of abnormal cells that continue to grow and divide in the body without control), which often invade surrounding normal healthy tissue, and may spread to other sites in the body (or 'metastasise').

There are many different types of cancer, and although the cause of most is unknown, we do know that in cats both feline leukaemia virus (FeLV) and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) are viral infections that can lead to cancer development. Fortunately these infections can be detected easily by blood tests.

When cancer is diagnosed, a natural and common reaction is 'What have I done wrong?' or 'What could I have done to have prevented this from happening?' While these are entirely natural responses, in the vast majority of cases we simply don't know what will have led to the development of the cancer, and therefore it would have been impossible to prevent.

What are the signs of cancer?

Cancers can affect any tissue in the body, so the signs that develop are extremely diverse and often quite vague. In general, cancers affect older cats more commonly, and the signs will

depend on the tissues affected (eg. intestinal signs, breathing difficulty, unexplained lumps, unexplained bleeding). As it is important to diagnose cancer early, veterinary advice should be sought as soon as any abnormalities are noticed.

How is cancer diagnosed?

To diagnose cancer and to determine optimum treatment, a biopsy of the affected tissue is usually needed, which can be examined by a pathologist. Additional investigations may also be required (such as X-rays, ultrasound and blood tests) to identify the location and extent of any tumour and any additional diseases.

Can cancer be treated?

Many treatment options are available for cancers (these are covered in more detail in an accompanying fact sheet). Not all cancers respond well to therapy and the choice of whether or not to treat, and how to treat, will depend on many factors. Some forms of therapy are only available at specialist centres, such as the AHT, to which your vet may refer you.

What are the common cancers that affect cats?

Because of the enormous variety of cancers that can affect cats (as with any other animal), it is impossible to list all the different types and their common manifestations. However, some of the most commonly encountered cancers include the following:

- **Lymphoma (malignant lymphoma, lymphosarcoma)**

This is probably the single most common cancer that affects cats, and is a solid tumour of a type of white blood cell (lymphocyte). The cancer can affect lymph nodes (or lymph 'glands') in the body or a wide variety of other tissues.

- **Squamous cell carcinoma**

This is a cancer affecting the skin, and sunlight is one trigger-factor for its development. It most commonly affects the nose and ears and is seen more commonly in white cats.

- **Oral squamous cell carcinoma**

This is a similar cancer but arises from the cells lining the mouth or throat, and often causes progressive difficulty in eating.

- **Mammary carcinoma**

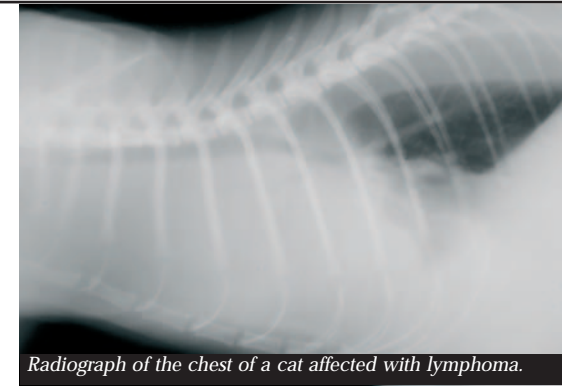
This cancer affects the mammary glands, and is seen most commonly (but not exclusively) in entire female cats. Affected glands often develop multiple firm swellings or nodules which may ulcerate.

- **Mast cell tumour**

Mast cells are cells involved in some types of immune responses. Tumours from these cells commonly affect the skin, spleen and/or intestines.

- **Fibrosarcoma/soft tissue sarcoma**

These cancers arise from supporting tissues, and most commonly cause gradually enlarging lumps under the skin.



Radiograph of the chest of a cat affected with lymphoma.

- **Osteosarcoma**

This cancer arises from the bones – it can be very painful and, if a limb is affected, can cause weakening of the bone and fractures (breaks), with severe pain and lameness.

- **Respiratory (lung or nose) carcinoma**

A number of cancers can affect the respiratory tract, these tend to cause progressive difficulty with breathing and may also cause sneezing and nasal discharge.

- **Intestinal adenocarcinoma**

These tumours affect either the small or large intestine and often cause signs due to partial blockage of the intestine (loss of appetite, weight loss, vomiting and diarrhoea).

- **Pancreatic and liver (bile duct) adenocarcinoma**

Cancers affecting the liver or pancreas are not very common in cats but can cause jaundice, depression, weight loss, vomiting and distension of the abdomen.