



Registered charity no: 209642

Your Cat &

CANCER TREATMENT



The Animal *Health* Trust is an internationally recognised centre of excellence in the field of veterinary medicine.

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.

As a registered charity, it receives no government funding and relies on charitable support in the form of legacies and donations. You can help in the following ways:

- Becoming an AHT Friend
- Making a donation
- Buying AHT merchandise
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To find out more

Telephone:

Fundraising Department on 08700 502380

Email: fundraising@aht.org.uk

Visit our website: www.aht.org.uk

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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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How are cancers treated?

When you learn your cat has cancer there are often feelings of bewilderment and even guilt ('how could I have prevented this?'), and it inevitably takes time to come to terms with the disease. For most tumours, the underlying cause is simply unknown, and therefore prevention is impossible. However, for many tumours, treatment may be available that will significantly improve both the quality and length of life.

It is worth discussing with your vet what treatment options are available – help and advice from specialist centres (such as the AHT) can be obtained by your vet and, for some forms of treatment, your cat may need to be referred to one of these centres. If that happens, you will be able to discuss treatment options with a specialist, but treatment will only be undertaken if you decide to have this done.

The aim of cancer treatment is to provide a good quality of life for the patient without producing unacceptable side-effects with treatment. Ideally this also means a longer life, but unnecessary suffering must be avoided, and euthanasia often has to be considered at some point. This is a distressing time, and it helps to

have talked in advance with your vet about the guidelines by which you can judge the quality of life by. It is also helpful to have the support of friends or family.

There are three main forms of therapy for cancer – surgery, chemotherapy (drugs) and radiation therapy. The treatment options for any cat will depend on many factors, including the type of cancer, its site, whether it has spread elsewhere and what is available/accessible to you.

Surgery for cancer patients

Surgery is the most common form of therapy for cancer. Although a cure (complete removal of the tumour) is not always possible (due to local or distant spread of the tumour), surgery can have several other goals:

- Obtaining a biopsy (sample of the tissue) to determine the type of cancer present
- Repeating surgery where the first attempt failed to remove all affected tissue
- Removal of a large bulk of tumour to allow additional therapy (drugs or radiation therapy) and/or improve the quality of life

Radiation therapy

Radiation therapy is a frightening concept for many as it is often assumed to cause numerous



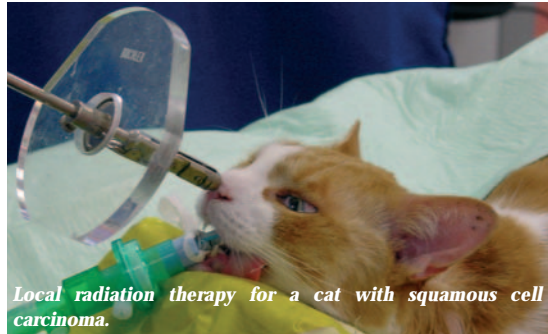
side-effects. However, the goal is to improve quality of life and relieve any discomfort, without causing any unnecessary additional suffering. Radiation therapy is able to achieve this for many cat cancers, although unfortunately its availability is quite restricted and so your veterinary surgeon is likely to have to refer you to a specialist centre (such as the AHT).

Radiation therapy generally requires several short treatments over a 3-5 week period. This can cure some tumours, while others can be shrunk and controlled for a good period of time. Side-effects such as nausea and vomiting are extremely rare, and cats generally tolerate radiation therapy extremely well.

Chemotherapy (drug therapy)

As with radiation therapy, the thought of chemotherapy often carries many misconceptions. Although anti-cancer drugs can, and do on occasions, produce side effects, most people are surprised and relieved at how well cats tolerate chemotherapy. This is partly because cats tolerate treatment better than people do, and partly because lower doses are sometimes used to avoid side-effects that could affect the quality of life.

Many different drugs are available, and your vet will be able to discuss this with you and if necessary, refer you to a specialist for further advice and/or treatment. Drugs are usually



Local radiation therapy for a cat with squamous cell carcinoma.

given as tablets or by injection. Combinations of drugs are often used so that the dose of any one drug can be minimised. Side effects that may be seen with chemotherapy include (but are not limited to):

- Bone marrow suppression causing a low white blood cell count - regular blood samples are taken to monitor this.
- Hair loss – this is rarely seen in cats, and where present usually just affects the whiskers.
- Gastrointestinal irritation

It is helpful to keep a diary of your cat's behaviour while it is receiving chemotherapy, including a note of any vomiting or diarrhoea present, and the cat's appetite, and any other changes you notice. Always contact your vet if you have any concerns.