

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CHEMOTHERAPY IN DOGS AND CATS

What is chemotherapy?

Chemotherapy agents are medications that kill cancer cells. These medications are usually given intravenously (into the vein) on an outpatient basis, but some are available as a daily pill that can be given at home. The goal of chemotherapy is to control a pet's cancer and to prolong survival while maintaining a good quality of life at home.

When is chemotherapy recommended?

Chemotherapy is typically used in the following circumstances in dogs and cats:

- For pets with cancers in which chemotherapy is the treatment of choice (for example, in cases of lymphoma and leukemia)
- After surgical removal of a primary tumor which has a high likelihood of spreading to other areas of the body (for example, in cases of bone cancer, hemangiosarcoma, and high grade mast cell tumors)
- For pets with non-surgical tumors in which the goal is to delay growth and control clinical signs (for example, in cases of metastatic mast cell tumors, thyroid carcinomas, and bladder tumors)



What side effects can chemotherapy cause in dogs and cats?

Because the priority in veterinary oncology is to maintain a patient's good quality of life, veterinary oncologists use doses and schedules of chemotherapy with the goal of minimizing side effects.

Most chemotherapy agents work by affecting rapidly dividing cells, so the cells of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract and the bone marrow can be affected. However, approximately 80-85% of patients have minimal to no side effects from chemotherapy. About 15-20% of patients may have side effects that require treatment, but the incidence of requiring hospitalization from side effects is less than 5%. Patients typically are sent home with anti-nausea and anti-diarrheal medications for use as needed. In addition, the patient's blood cell counts are closely monitored; if the white blood cell count drops too low, antibiotics are prescribed to help protect against potential infection.

Overall, most veterinary patients tolerate chemotherapy very well and maintain or regain an excellent quality of life during the treatment protocol.

Will my dog or cat lose their hair?

Most dogs and cats do not have any hair loss secondary to chemotherapy. However, clipped fur may regrow slowly, and some breeds that require grooming, such as poodles, schnauzers, and bichon frise, can develop hair loss or skin pigment change to varying degrees. Additionally, cats may lose their whiskers. Lost hair will usually regrow after discontinuation of chemotherapy, although it may differ in color and texture.

For more information about chemotherapy or cancer treatment for your dog or cat in general, MedVet is a resource available to you and your family veterinarian. Visit our [Locations Page](#) to find your nearest MedVet.

