



# Cancer and your pet ... the good and the bad

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# Introduction:

Let's talk about the "C"-word...Cancer. Not an easy subject to broach, and equally difficult to talk about. Let's be honest, most of us would be horrified to hear that our pet has received this diagnosis.

Most people will have some sort of experience with cancer, whether personally, or through a friend or family member. This experience likely leaves us with a very specific and subjective impression of what a diagnosis of cancer means, and also the effects of the treatment process and its financial, emotional and physical cost. This said, I would like to try to give some facts about this disease, and to offer some helpful information regarding its diagnosis and treatment in our pets.

# Prevalence of cancer in pets:

It has been my experience over the years that cancers of various kinds are increasing in prevalence in the pet population. In fact, it may be that almost 50% of dogs over the age of 10 years could develop some form of cancer, thus constituting a major cause of illness in older pets. Around one in three cats will develop cancer during their lives.

*In my experience ...*



*"50% of dogs over the age of 10 are at risk of developing cancer"*



*"1 in 3 cats will develop cancer in their lives"*

*In addition...*

**Certain dog breeds appear to have an increased risk of developing cancer**

*(as reported from North America).*



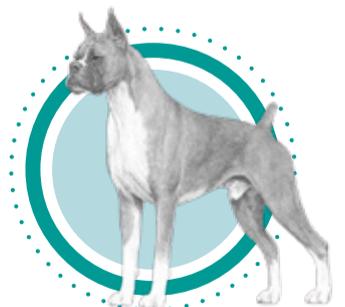
**BERNESE MOUNTAIN DOG**



**GOLDEN RETRIEVER**

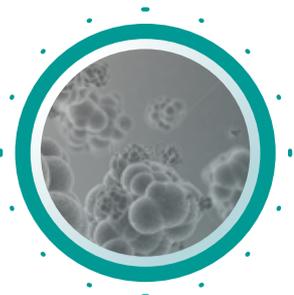


**SCOTTISH TERRIER**



**BOXER**





## *It is important to bear in mind that “Cancer” is not a single disease ...*

The term covers a multitude of separate disease entities. These include types of tumours that are classified as benign (non-aggressive), and those which are malignant (aggressive, likely to progress or spread). Malignancies also have various causes, some of which may be environmental (sunlight, parasites, chemicals), and as with so many things nowadays, the internet and social media are flush with those who claim to have discovered the cause of many cancers in pets. Unfortunately, most of this is purely hype and not based on any real evidence. The fact is, it has been known for decades now that cancer is a genetic disease (hence the breed predispositions mentioned earlier). This understanding developed from decades of research in people with certain kinds of breast cancer (and other kinds), for example.



## *Cancer may present with many different symptoms ...*

These include weight loss and malaise, to anaemia, loss of appetite and many other manifestations. A discreet lump or growth is not always visible or obvious. Even small lesions that appear benign may in fact be more sinister.

This unfortunately means that cancer very often does not show up until it has already spread to other areas of the body. We therefore would always recommend having any lump or bump checked by your vet as early as possible.



## *Keys to effective cancer treatment ...*

The golden rule in cancer treatment is early detection of the condition. Many cancer types carry a much more favourable outcome when detected early in the disease process. Early diagnosis often allows more therapeutic options and ensures a better outcome.

### ***Accurate diagnosis in another important factor.***

This is usually achieved by means of a procedure known as a biopsy, and may be augmented by additional tests which allow staging of the cancer.



Ultrasound Scans



Blood tests



CT Scans



X-rays



**Chest X-ray**  
with multiple tumours evident



**CT scans (computed tomography)**  
can show a tumour's shape, size, and location.