

MAMMARY TUMOURS IN CATS

Mammary tumours are relatively common in middle aged and older unspeyed female cats. The majority of mammary tumours are malignant, grow quickly and frequently undergo secondary spread to other parts of the body with fatal consequences.

What causes mammary tumours?

Mammary tumours occur in mammary glands that have been exposed to female hormones. They are rare in cats spayed (ovario-hysterectomy) before their first season. As in dogs, mammary tumours of cats are preventable. In general, any cat that is not going to be used for breeding is best spayed before its first season to prevent mammary cancer and unwanted pregnancy.

How could mammary tumours affect my cat?

The majority of mammary tumours in cats are malignant. They tend to grow quickly over a matter of weeks to a few months and become inflamed, swollen and ulcerated. They can involve more than one gland and frequently spread to the adjacent lymph glands. Further secondary spread to the lungs, in particular, is also common and this is invariably fatal.

Can mammary cancer of cats be treated?

At an early stage when the tumours are small, wide surgical excision has the best chance of achieving a cure. This surgery may involve removal of all mammary tissue especially if there is more than one tumour. Anticancer drugs (chemotherapy) have been tried and can give some temporary relief when the tumour is ulcerated or too big to remove. Anticancer drugs have also been suggested to reducing the rate at which secondaries develop. To date the actual effectiveness of these drugs is not known.

What is the prognosis?

The majority of mammary cancers in cats are aggressive with a high secondary rate; therefore the prognosis has to be guarded. If lymph glands are involved at the time of surgery then the prognosis is very grave. Wide surgery when the tumours are small carries the best hope of a cure.

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