

## **SKIN TUMOURS IN DOGS AND CATS**

The skin is the most common site to be affected by a tumour in dogs and the second in cats. Skin is a complex structure with several different cell types and as a result a number of different tumours can develop. In fact some 25 different tumours have been identified although some are quite rare. In dogs, the majority of skin tumours are benign whereas in cats the majority are malignant.

Benign skin tumours are usually slow growing, well defined and mobile over underlying structures. Malignant tumours tend to grow faster, infiltrate into adjacent tissue and may become red, inflamed and ulcerated. However, the physical appearance of the tumour is not always a guide to how it will behave. Needle samples for cytology or a surgical biopsy for histology may be necessary to identify the tumour type more accurately. The type of tumour determines how it is likely to behave and what the best course of treatment should be.

Many of the skin tumours in dogs are benign and will never be a life-threatening problem. Whilst most benign tumours are easily cured by simple surgery, not all warrant immediate removal as some may never become a problem. However, even small warts can become a problem if they bleed or become infected. Similarly what feels like a fatty lump can grow to such a size that it interferes with how the dog walks. Whenever a skin tumour is found it should be brought to the attention of your vet and monitored closely.

The malignant skin tumours should be taken more seriously. Surgical removal at an early stage, when the tumour is still small, should be considered. If left, they will grow and will reach such a size that surgery cannot achieve a cure. In addition, malignant tumours can undergo secondary spread (metastasis) to local lymph nodes and more distant sites. The rate at which secondary spread occurs varies immensely between tumours. Certainly for some tumours, the larger they become the more likely they are to spread. Surgical removal of a tumour when it is small is most likely to be curative. Some malignant skin tumours may need other treatment such as radiotherapy or anti-cancer drugs to obtain better control or indeed cure.

The common skin tumours in dogs include mast cell tumour, squamous cell carcinoma, sweat gland carcinoma, sebaceous tumours, lipoma, fibrosarcoma, haemangiopericytoma, melanoma and peri-anal adenoma.

In the cat, the common skin tumours are squamous cell carcinoma, mast cell tumour, fibrosarcoma and ceruminous gland tumours within the ear canal.

There is marked variation in behaviour of skin tumours. Laboratory assessment (histopathology) is required to identify the exact tumour type and thereby ascertain the prognosis. Surgery remains the most important treatment for most skin tumours but radiotherapy, and to lesser extent anticancer drugs, can also be used.

**Contact details for the Animal Cancer Trust**  
Animal Cancer Trust

5 Flag Business Exchange, Vicarage Farm Road, Peterborough, PE1 5TX  
Telephone no: 08701 644225  
Email: [info@animalcancertrust.org.uk](mailto:info@animalcancertrust.org.uk)  
Website: [www.animalcancertrust.org.uk](http://www.animalcancertrust.org.uk)  
Registered Charity no 1094779