



Caring for a dog with terminal cancer



Although treatment options are available for many types of cancer, sometimes treatment is not a good option. Decisions must be made to decide how best to care for your dog to ensure they have a good quality of life while they are still pain free and to plan their end of life care.

Firstly, what is a tumour? A tumour is an uncontrolled growth of cells in the body. These growths can be malignant (cancerous and likely to spread), or benign (not cancer and usually localised). Tumours can grow sufficiently large that they stop other organs from functioning properly. The progression of a tumour will depend on its type and location.

Once an incurable cancer has been diagnosed, you need to discuss with your vet how to care for your dog. In some cases, the kindest thing may be to opt for euthanasia, particularly if your dog is in pain and suffering. In other cases, where your dog is still comfortable and relatively healthy, palliative or hospice style home care is an option. This usually involves using medication to relieve pain and discomfort, including non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs) such as meloxicam, opioid pain relievers, steroids such as prednisolone and sometimes local anaesthetics. Palliative care can make your dog more comfortable, giving you an opportunity to spend some quality time with your dog and make the most of the time they have left. Owners often comment on how much of a difference a little pain relieving medicine makes in making their dog more comfortable and even improving appetite.

A dog relies on its sense of smell so warming food and offering special treats can help to keep a dog eating well on its own. It is also very important to ensure that there are plenty of opportunities to drink liquids so your dog does not become dehydrated. Multiple water bowls with fresh and/or flowing water, chicken stock or other tasty broths can encourage dogs to take in enough liquids

Sadly, there will come a time when your dog is suffering and has lost their quality of life. Often there is a change in behaviour such as hiding or

flinching when touched, becoming withdrawn, loss of appetite, reluctance to move, restlessness or difficulty in getting comfortable. If your dog is no longer his/her "old self", then usually you will know that it is time. It is useful to note the number of good days and bad days in a week. A "good" day might be one where your dog is willing to do those activities it normally enjoys such as going for a walk or playing with a toy and eats and drinks without any coaxing. A "bad" day might be one where you cannot tempt your dog to eat or drink much and/or he/she may have a toileting accident or strain to do any eliminations. When the bad days outweigh the good, you will know that it is time to make a decision about end of life options. It is important that you feel comfortable having a discussion with your vet practice about end of life options, including the euthanasia procedure, care of the remains and how you wish to be involved.

Whilst many owners seek veterinary assistance with euthanasia, some would prefer their animals to die naturally. As much as we would like our pets (and family) to die peacefully, this is not a common occurrence. Many owners report that their only regret was in waiting too long before ending their pet's suffering. In most cases you can arrange for a veterinary surgeon to perform euthanasia in your home.

There is a great deal of information on the internet and in books about pet loss. Advice and support around pet loss are available from Blue Cross for Pets, The Ralph Site, HelpGuide.org and many other organisations. The Animal Cancer Trust website also hosts a Friends Remembered Gallery where you can upload a photo and tribute to your pet.

For more information please visit our website: www.animalcancertrust.co.uk.