



Chemotherapy –Frequently Asked Questions

Should I continue to give my pet their monthly heartworm and flea prevention?

Yes. It is important that your pet continues to be protected from heartworms, fleas, and ticks. Please continue their monthly heartworm and flea prevention as usual. This will not interfere with their chemotherapy treatment. Please note that we do not sell heartworm or flea prevention at BVS so this will need to be purchased from your regular veterinarian.

Can my pet eat before chemotherapy?

Yes, your pet can eat normally and receive their morning medications (if any) prior to chemotherapy treatment. However, occasionally, certain testing might require fasting. We will inform you before your appointment if fasting is necessary.

Why don't pets feel sick like people do?

For animals receiving chemotherapy, quality of life for the patient is the primary concern for us and for each pet's owner. Doses of drugs and treatment schedules are designed to minimize discomfort to the patient, while providing the most effective defense against the disease. As a result, most people are pleasantly surprised at how well their pets feel while undergoing chemotherapy.

Do I need to limit the exposure of other pets to my pet receiving therapy?

Other pets can be around the chemotherapy patient with no risk, but should not be allowed to lick urine or ingest stool of the patients. Most metabolized chemotherapy is out of the patients system in 72 hours.

Can my dog go to the groomers while receiving chemotherapy?

A common side effect of chemotherapy is a decrease in the white blood cell count which can make them more susceptible to contracting infections. Therefore bringing your pet to a grooming salon can expose them to many other pets which may put them at risk of contracting a possible infection or illness. We recommend using a mobile groomer who will come to your home. This way your pet will be groomed quickly and with minimal exposure to other animals. It is important that you continue your pet's normal grooming regimen such as brushing, cleaning of the ears and bathing. This will help prevent secondary problems such as skin or ear infections.

How do I know if my dog or cat is in pain?

You know your pet better than anyone else. If there is any reason for you to think that they are acting differently, let us know. Every pet expresses pain differently and cats are especially good at hiding pain and discomfort.

Is it safe to give my pet vaccines while on chemotherapy?

While undergoing cancer therapy it is possible that your pet's immune system is compromised either due to the cancer itself or by chemotherapy. We do not recommend vaccinating your pet during chemotherapy. If your pet has a history of aggression, the doctor may recommend they continue to receive their rabies vaccine.

My pet is tired lately, but eating and drinking normally. Should I be concerned?

Our first recommendation would be to check a rectal temperature to rule out a fever. You can go to your local drug store and purchase a rectal thermometer and take your pet's temperature. Designate this thermometer for your pet's use only. Use a small amount of Vaseline on the end of the probe and insert about an inch into the rectum. A normal temperature for dogs and cats is 100-102.5°F. If your pet's temperature is elevated, we will likely ask you to bring your pet in for evaluation either with us or your local veterinarian. Some pets just take a few days to get back to normal after treatments so this may be normal for them. Always call if you are concerned.

Is there any reason that I should limit my pet's activity after chemotherapy?

Let your pet decide their activity level. Every pet is going to be different, but the majority of our patients have no appreciable change in activity level the day of chemotherapy.

Is chemotherapy toxic?

The overall toxicity rate is very low in veterinary chemotherapy. There is a chance of side effects or complications but these are rare and usually resolve with supportive therapies. Our primary goal is to provide the best quality of life possible for as long as possible.

What should I do if my pet experiences vomiting, lack of appetite, or diarrhea?

We have provided you with the medications called metronidazole (flagyl) and cerenia. These are used to treat the potential side effects of chemotherapy. Cerenia is used to treat vomiting and/ or lack of appetite. Metronidazole is used to treat diarrhea or loose stool. You can use these medications as needed. If there is any question whether to start these drugs, please call and speak to one of our staff members.

Should I change my pet's diet while they are on chemotherapy?

We do not recommend changing your pet's diet when we first start a new medication. Diet change can lead to stomach upset and then it is difficult to know if the medication or the diet change caused the issue. If you would like to change your pet's diet once they are accustomed to their therapy please change it gradually over 1-2 weeks to avoid stomach upset and discuss that change with us in advance.

Should I add supplements to my pet's diet while they are on chemotherapy?

There is some evidence that certain compounds that have antioxidant potential may interfere with chemotherapy. Most of the available supplements for pets have not been scientifically evaluated to determine their safety or efficacy in animals receiving chemotherapy. As we do not know if there could be interactions we ask that you refrain from giving supplements while on chemotherapy. The exceptions to this are fish oils and flax seed oils. We know that these are safe to give to pets while they receive chemotherapy.

What happens during my pet's chemotherapy drop-off appointment?

Chemotherapy treatments are most often given during drop-off appointments because the treatment process takes time. We ask that you drop off your pet between 7:30am-8:30am. We understand that this is not always possible due to scheduling conflicts and we will do our best to accommodate your needs. Typically your pet will be able to go home around lunch time but they are welcome to stay as long as needed. Your pet will be given a bed, water and taken on walks or given a litter box while they are in our care. You can bring your pet's food if you would like us to feed them at any point. You are also welcome to bring their favorite toy or bedding.

When you drop off your pet, you will be asked to fill out a drop-off form. This is an important resource for us as it lets us know how your pet has been feeling, if you have any questions or concerns, or if any medication refills are needed. It also provides us with the best phone number with which to contact you.

Your pet's visit will include a full physical exam by Dr. Kilcullen. We will then draw a blood sample for a CBC (complete blood count). This test is required before administration of chemotherapy to ensure that the white blood cells are adequate for treatment. Depending on the type of chemotherapy your pet is receiving, other blood tests or diagnostics may be necessary before treatment. If your pet requires an intravenous drug, an IV catheter will be placed in a leg to administer the treatment.

When your pet's treatment is complete, a nurse will call to let you know that your pet is ready to be discharged. You are welcome to pick up your pet at any point during our normal business hours. You will be given discharge papers at the end of each visit. This will keep you informed as to how your pet is doing, which treatment they were given and any medication changes that were made. After reading your discharges, we are happy to answer any additional questions that you may have.