

Pets 101: What are the options for a dog with cancer?

Dog owners are often shocked when they find out their beloved dog has cancer. Many dog lovers think only humans get cancer until they're faced with bad news, options to consider, and decisions to make. Unfortunately, about one out of three dogs is affected by cancer at some point in his or her life, and cancer is the leading cause of death in dogs over age ten.

The first question most people have when their dog is diagnosed with cancer is, "What should I do?"

Treatment options should always be discussed with the dog's veterinarian first. Whether or not the dog can or should be treated will depend on several factors including:

- Age and general health of the dog
- Type of cancer and stage of progression
- Beliefs of the dog owner
- Financial resources and time available

Veterinarians, depending on their own beliefs, practice, and expertise, may offer different options. Some have training in veterinary oncology (the study of cancer) and may be able to offer treatment such as chemotherapy right in the office. Some may refer clients to a veterinary oncologist or a veterinary hospital or work in conjunction with the oncologist. Some may advise no treatment at all other than keeping the animal comfortable.

Keep the following in mind when considering the advice of the dog's veterinarian:

- A typical veterinarian is a generalist, not a specialist
- Even the best veterinarian may not be aware of all cancer treatment options available
- The veterinarian may not be qualified or willing to discuss all options

It's best that the owner of a dog diagnosed with cancer is fully aware of all the options available. Here are the main choices to consider:

Keep the animal comfortable: If the vet offers this advice, be sure to ask what he or she means. It could mean do nothing except love and care for the dog and, when you're ready, bring the animal in for euthanizing (put to sleep). It could also mean to treat symptoms, such as nausea, pain, or infection as they arise, and euthanize when the animal's condition no longer justifies care.

Holistic care only: Holistic approaches attempt to treat the whole animal, to strengthen the immune system, and to help the dog be as healthy as possible in every way so the cancer cannot progress. Holistic cancer care could mean anything from a special diet and herbal or nutraceutical products to treatment such as [acupuncture](#), [cranio-sacral therapy](#), [homeopathic](#) care, and [Reiki](#). A veterinarian who specializes in holistic care should be consulted for guidance when this approach is chosen.

Traditional care only: Traditional vets generally seek to remove the disease though many may also prescribe a special diet that they sell through their offices. Treatment may include surgery and a full course of chemotherapy and/or radiation. Be sure that the vet is qualified to treat cancer. Be sure to collect information, discuss plans with family members, and evaluate finances and time available to care for the dog before making decisions.

Holistic and traditional care: This approach combines a strengthening of the dog's overall health and wellness along with an attempt to remove or eradicate the cancer. A holistic and traditional vet may work together in the same office, they may consult with one another over the phone, or the dog's owner may consult with each separately. In some cases, a veterinary oncologist will head the team, the traditional vet will take care of routine blood work and check-ups, and the holistic veterinarian offers care for the overall well-being of the dog through non-invasive treatments.

The decisions made when faced with cancer in a beloved dog should always be done not only with the dog's best interest in mind but also that of the owner and family. None of the options are easy. It can be just as heart-wrenching to *not* treat the dog as it is to attempt to save his life or extend it. Knowing what all the options are and considering as much information as possible will help with the decision.

If you found this article useful, you may also want to read [Pets 101: What should I feed my dog?](#)



For more info:

[University of Pennsylvania Oncolink Vet: Treatment options](#)

[Veterinary Oncology Services and Research Center](#) – West Chester, PA

[Animal Wellness Center](#) – Chadds Ford, PA

[Clayton Veterinary Associates](#): Natural and Holistic Healing – Clayton, NJ

[Cedarbrook Animal Hospital: Classical Veterinary Homeopathy](#) – Sicklerville, NJ

[Canine Cancer Awareness](#)

[About.com Veterinary Medicine](#): Canine Cancer Information

[Alternative and Complimentary Therapies for Animals with Cancer](#)