



at the heart of critical care

ANIMAL EMERGENCY CENTER

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MAMMARY CANCER IN CATS

Mammary (breast) cancer is the third most common cancer in cats. Almost 90% of feline mammary tumors are malignant, meaning they have the potential to spread to other parts of the body. The most common sites of spread are the regional lymph nodes and lungs. Around 10% of feline mammary tumors are benign, meaning they will not spread except by local growth. To date, surgical excision at the earliest possible opportunity is the most effective therapy for any mammary tumor. If the tumor is benign, complete surgical excision may be curative. If the tumor is malignant, large, and/or evidence of lymph node involvement is detected, post-surgical treatment with chemotherapy is recommended. These options will be discussed with you following surgery, if appropriate.

Prior to performing surgery, additional testing such as blood tests, X-rays of the chest, and/or ultrasound examination of the abdomen may be performed to ensure that there is no evidence of spread to other areas of the body. If spread is detected, it significantly changes the type of treatment that we are likely to offer and the prognosis for your cat.

Biopsy of mammary tumors prior to removing them is often not performed for the following reasons:

1. Initially benign tumors may transform at a later date to malignant forms.
2. Multiple tumors must be individually biopsied, as each one may be a different subtype of mammary tumor.
3. Within the same mass, a mixture of benign and malignant tissue may be present.

Instead, we recommend a single surgical procedure in which all affected tissue or potentially affected tissue is removed. The recommended surgical treatment for feline mammary tumors is a radical mastectomy. In this procedure, all mammary tissues on both sides, plus the lymph nodes draining the mammary area are removed. The suture line following a radical mastectomy extends from the armpit to the groin area. On occasion, small rubber drains will be inserted in the groin region to prevent fluid accumulation. These drains are removed 3-4 days after surgery. All cats are bandaged after surgery, and these bandages are usually removed 3-4 days later. Some cats may be required to wear an Elizabethan collar to discourage them from chewing or licking at the sutures. This is sometimes performed as one large procedure, or sometimes as two procedures separated by 4-6 weeks.

The cat's activity must be curtailed for a short time after surgery to avoid fluid build-up along the suture line or dehiscence (wound gaping). Climbing stairs, jumping from furniture and energetic play should be discouraged. Pathologic diagnosis of the tumor will be usually available 3-5 days after surgery, and we will telephone you with these results. Ten to fourteen days after surgery, the sutures will be removed and chemotherapy can be started, if indicated.

While we have no definitive statistics regarding how effective chemotherapy is for improving the prognosis in cats with mammary tumors after surgery, there are drugs that have been used that show some effectiveness. Chemotherapy treatments are usually extremely well tolerated in cats, with less than 5% of patients experiencing severe side effects (please see the CHEMOTHERAPY IN PETS handout for more detailed information). Chemotherapy for this disease typically consists of an intravenous injection of a drug called **doxorubicin** (Adriamycin). This treatment is given once every 3 weeks for a total of 5 treatments.

Following the completion of treatment, we typically recommend that regular rechecks be performed, so that any evidence of recurrence or spread can be detected early. A typical recheck schedule might be visits every 3 months for 1 1/2 years, then twice yearly thereafter. At these rechecks, we will perform a thorough physical examination, obtain chest X-rays to rule out tumor spread, and check kidney values.

Should tumor spread be detected at the time of the first visit or at a later time, chemotherapy may be able to cause significant tumor shrinkage in approximately half the cats treated, which can persist for various amounts of time.