

Supporting Companion Animals with Cancer

"Dogs rarely die of cancer. They usually succumb to secondary liver or kidney failure. These are cancer side effects that can usually be avoided by controlling the diet"

What should I be feeding an animal recovering from cancer?

Regardless of the type of cancer your animal has been diagnosed with, the one thing every type of cancer has in common is the need for a specialised diet that will enable the animal to effectively recover from their illness.

Just like in the human body, an animal suffering from cancer is building a lot of new tissue, and adequate proteins and fats (ie omega 3, 6 and 9 fatty acids) are required to enable this to occur. When adequate amounts of the correct proteins and fats are not present in the diet, the body is forced to take it from other places, and this can result in additional side effects ranging from muscle wasting to liver and/or kidney failure.

Dogs and cats are, of course, carnivores ie they did not evolve as grain eaters. This means that their bodies do not produce the enzymes necessary to allow them to easily digest grains. Therefore the single most important rule for feeding any animal with cancer is to avoid grains such as rice, corn, wheat etc.

Animals recovering from cancer should be given a diet comprising 60-80% of animal based protein and fats. Animal protein sources include canned sardines, cottage cheese, eggs and of course, any type of meat. Meat can be cooked or left raw however you should never feed any animal cooked bones as they can shatter and cause serious internal injuries.

If you prefer the convenience of commercial dry foods, you must be aware that the majority of them (even the superior brands) use rice, wheat or corn as fillers. If you are planning on feeding an animal recovering from cancer commercial food, it is extremely important that you read the ingredient label and make sure that the first ingredient on the list is some type of meat. As mentioned earlier, you will almost always find some grains listed, but it is important that they are well down in the list and not right at the top.

Commercial dry foods should **always** be supplemented with additional animal protein sources (see the examples listed above).

What natural supplements can be used?

When an animal is recovering from cancer, one of the major concerns is supporting the immune function to return to normal.

The following list contains recommendations on the best natural supplements to support this:

- **Fish Oil** is a good source of Omega 3, 6 and 9 fatty acids available in liquid or gelcaps.
- **Echinacea** is an immune-system booster available in many different forms (eg tablets, tinctures, capsules, and extracts of dried or fresh roots).
- **Shark Cartilage** has properties which have been shown to reduce blood vessels in tumors.
- **Astragalus** comes from the root of the plant *Astragalus membranaceus* used in China to fight respiratory infections including colds and flu. Studies in the West have confirmed its immune-boosting and anti-viral properties.
- **Cat's Claw** comes from the Peruvian plant *Uncaria tomentosa* used to treat arthritis and cancer. Studies have confirmed that it has antioxidants and immune-enhancing properties.
- **Vitamin E** and **Selenium** are both antioxidants that can be used to support chemotherapy, however while antioxidants enhance the effectiveness of some chemotherapy drugs, they may also interfere with some drugs. Therefore you should always discuss their use with your oncologist before administering them.

What additional supporting treatments can help?

- **Acupuncture** can relieve pain and provide analgesia without the side effects of drugs. It can stabilize the function of the adrenal gland and increase endogenous cortico-steroid secretion without the side effects of steroids.
- **Magnetic Therapy** can be used to suppress cell mitosis, viral/bacterial growth, tumors and inflammation. Read more about [Magnetic Therapy](#) for animals.
- **Reiki** can be used to transfer healing energy to a patient either directly or by distance. Read more about [Reiki for Animals](#).

IMPORTANT: cancer is a very serious disease and should be diagnosed by, and a treatment plan agreed with, your veterinarian. The treatments discussed in this document should be used as a complement to, and never in place of, any treatment plan recommended by your veterinarian.