

Cancer Prevention

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It's far better to avoid cancer than it to have to treat it. Pets are just as likely to get cancer as we are, so what can do to improve the odds?

1. Choice of pet

It's not a big deal for cats, but for dogs there are some breeds with much higher risks of certain cancers. Bernese mountain dogs are at high risk for histiocytic sarcoma. Golden retrievers are at higher risk of lymphoma. Boxers and Staffordshire bull terriers are higher risk for mast cell tumours. Problem is, they're all beautiful dogs and I would happily have any one of them. If you choose a mongrel, you've probably got the healthiest dog. If you'd love a golden retriever, then do it – just check with your vet what to look for.

2. Diet

For people we know that being overweight and eating red meat (and drinking alcohol) increases our risk of cancer. For pets, the science just isn't there. I'd like you to keep your pet at a decent weight more because it helps them get the most from their life than it might limit their risk of cancer. Use a good balanced diet. If you rely on commercial food, then choose top shelf. If you use home prepared, then make sure it's balanced. For dogs that means a good range of vegetables and some meat. Cats **MUST** have a high meat diet. Starchy foods don't have much nutrition in them so no need to add rice or pasta. I'm not keen on supplements as there is no evidence they're helpful and some that they can be harmful. Go through it with your vet and make sure.

3. Exercise

Again, the science isn't there for this one with pets. Does exercise prevent cancer in dogs and cats? Don't know. Regardless, it's good for both of you. Get out there with your dog. Play with your cat. Enjoy the day.

4. Sunlight

Pale skin on cats and dogs will get cancer from sun exposure. For cats, it'll be noses, eyelids and ears. For dogs, it'll be their tummy (and armpits and inside thighs). **ANYTHING** that looks like a sore or a scratch or a blood blister that is still there a month later should be checked. If it recurs after treatment, ask for referral to a specialist oncologist. Most of these cancers don't spread, so early treatment should cure.

5. Sterilising your dog

This is the awkward one. It's probable (but not certain) that desexing a bitch lessens the chance of breast cancer; but **MIGHT** increase the risk of skin tumours, lymphoma and blood vessel cancers. For the males, it's equally difficult. Obviously, sterilised males don't get testicular cancer but prostate cancer might be **MORE** common when desexed. Joint and bone problems might be **MORE** common when desexed, which might cause bone cancer. All of this is still debated, because **ALL** studies to date have had faults. Confused? Me too. My thoughts? Anyone who thinks the answer is obvious is kidding themselves. Sterilising dogs has lots of benefits to society and may make life easier for you. If you're concerned, consider asking for a male dog to have a vasectomy rather than castration (and castrate when he's middle aged). For a bitch, ask to have an ovary left behind. Discuss this with your vet though as no option is perfect.

6. Be empowered

Regular check ups are important. You can do this yourself:

<http://www.caninecancer.org.au/checkingforlumps.html>

plus annual visits to your vet will find anything you missed.

The web site above is also good for a range of information on cancer in dogs.

