

BRAIN TUMOURS IN CATS AND DOGS



If your pet has been diagnosed with a brain tumour, this can be overwhelming news.

A brain tumour is a form of cancer affecting a very important part of the nervous system which is the brain. Brain tumours can originate from the outer lining (the meninges) of the brain, the inner lining, the blood vessels of the brain, the glands inside and beneath the brain, or the deep tissue of the brain itself.

Brain tumours can be benign: less likely to spread to other parts of the body and they are slow growing. Or they can be malignant, which have potential to spread to other parts of the body (metastasis) and grow faster.

Brain tumours are more likely to happen in elderly pets. However, we also recognise that certain breeds of dogs may be more likely to develop brain tumours such as Boxers and Golden Retrievers.

The most common brain tumours in dogs and cats are meningiomas, which is a typically benign tumour of the meninges. Tumours of the deeper brain tissue are also common, which we group together and term 'glioma'. Glioma is typically malignant (however still does not commonly spread) Other rarer brain tumours include choroid plexus tumours, ependymal tumours, pituitary tumours and embryologic tumours. We also see white blood cell cancers such as lymphoma and histiocytic sarcoma in the brain.

Clinical signs your pet might be showing

Dogs and cats with a brain tumour will develop symptoms that are related to the region of the brain that is affected. The most common sign in cats is change in behaviour (vacancy, staggering, circling) and epileptic seizures in dogs. However, a variety of signs can be observed like loss of normal training, wobbliness, weakness and blindness.

Diagnosis of brain tumours

The best imaging modality to reveal if your pet has a brain tumour is via an MRI. However, a complete diagnosis requires a piece of the tumour to be looked at under a microscope after surgical removal or brain biopsy.

Because of the potential of the brain tumour spreading to other parts of the body, blood work, chest X-rays, abdominal ultrasound or CT of the chest and abdomen is often suggested before further treatment.

What treatment could we offer

Treating a brain tumour must have a multidisciplinary approach. Medical, surgical and/or radiotherapy treatment should be discussed and considered based on the nature and localisation of the tumour and the patient's health. At Southfields, our expert team of Neurologists, Oncologists and Radiation therapy specialists will discuss together these cases and come up with the best approach for your pet.

Palliative treatment with steroids and antiepileptic drugs (if seizures) can alleviate temporarily some of the neurological symptoms. Prednisone has been postulated to improve quality of life in dogs with cancer through its anti-inflammatory, antioedema, and euphoric effects. However, results indicated that dogs with primary intracranial tumours have a grave prognosis and are unlikely to live more than few months.

Our experienced neurosurgery team at Southfields will discuss brain surgery if your pet's tumour is on an accessible area of the brain and minimal trauma to the rest of the brain is warranted. In general, dogs and cats recover much quicker and better than we would expect from brain surgery and they might go home only 48 hours after the procedure.

Because the brain is such a delicate part of the body, even with surgery it's almost impossible to remove entirely all the microscopic cancer cells. Radiotherapy is recommended post surgically in most cases. Moreover, Radiotherapy may be as effective as surgery in some types of brain tumour and radiotherapy is particularly useful for tumours that cannot be accessed easily with surgery. Radiotherapy treatment is commonly delivered in daily treatments over a four-week period if the patient is otherwise well. It is rare that we offer chemotherapy for brain tumours as most patients do not benefit from this. We will discuss this on an individual patient basis if we think your pet requires chemotherapy.

At Southfields, the quality of life of your pet is our main goal. We must admit that in only rare cases the brain tumour can be completely cured. However, depending on the nature and location of the brain tumour, the long term prognosis could be several years compared to several weeks to months with palliative treatment.



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