

Sunburn and Skin Cancers

Cats and dogs with pink skin on the face, nose, belly and scrotum are at risk of sunburn. Chronic sun exposure leads to skin cancers, just as it does in humans. Sometimes skin diseases can cause pigment loss and the underlying disease needs to be identified and treated to prevent sun burn and skin cancer.

Prevention

Prevention is far better than waiting until a cancer occurs and trying to cure it.

Sun exposure is best managed by practicing avoidance during the peak UV times (10am-4pm during summer and 11-3pm during winter). We tend to recommend sunscreens that do not include zinc or certain chemicals that could lead to toxicities in dogs and cats from chronically licking them off.

Sun suits (lycra and UPF50+ material) are recommended for short coated pink bellied dogs who like to lie in the sun. There are also nose covers that can be made up by owners or purchased online.

Treatment of sun induced skin cancers

Depending on the type of skin cancer there are several treatments available. This can range from simple surgical excision, laser treatment, Strontium radiation therapy or laser surgery. For anything other than surgical excision a referral to a specialist dermatologist will be required. For certain skin cancers a specialist veterinary oncologist may be required.

For pets that have pink skin exposed to sunlight, it is best to see your vet for regular checkups, to help detect the early onset of skin cancers.

Other skin cancers

If your pet has any lumps or bumps, crusts or ulcers that are not resolving on antibiotics, then there is a chance your pet may have a skin cancer. If a biopsy has confirmed a skin cancer, then there are certain cancers that we as specialist dermatologists treat regularly. Treatment may include chemotherapy, Strontium radiation therapy, laser therapy or surgical excision. Depending on the diagnosis, any one of these treatment combinations may be recommended. It is important that you gain further information from us via your referring vet prior to referral to ascertain which specialist is best to refer to. There are many cross-over specialties in the area of skin cancers.

If you think your pet may have a skin cancer or has had a diagnosis of a cancer, then discuss with your vet if a referral to a specialist dermatologist would be beneficial. In some circumstances your vet may need to talk to us to sort out which specialist your pet needs to see for certain types of skin cancers.