

## When your dog has cancer..

Your vet enters the treatment room and says, "I'm sorry but it is cancer." Your heart drops and your head spins.

As your vet outlines options, it all sounds so technical and full of jargon. It is important at this point to take a deep breath, try not to panic, and to get as much information from your vet as possible as a starting point. Unless your dog's health condition is precarious, most owners have a little time to decide about treatment.

Always ask your vet how advanced the cancer is, their experience in treating that type of cancer, and for a prognosis. If no treatment is pursued, how long does your dog have before quality of life is affected and a euthanasia decision must be made?

When considering treatments, owners will want to understand the side effects and the costs and how long the treatment is expected to prolong life before quality of life deteriorates.

Perhaps one of the most confusing things for owners is to understand the statistics that are quoted with a cancer diagnosis. For example, if your vet says that a likely survival range is 6-18 months, a realistic expectation would be about 9-12 months. If you are lucky and your dog responds well to treatment, you might get 18 months or more of quality time. Sadly, though, some dogs may not respond well. There's no way to predict with more certainty; everyone wants to hope for the best.

Talking through the diagnosis and doing some of their own homework and research helps many owners reach a treatment decision. When researching on the internet, it is best to stick with reputable institutions such as teaching hospitals and research institutes rather than companies wanting to sell you a 'miracle' supplement. Integrative therapies, such as nutrition and herbal medicine, can be used alongside traditional veterinary medications (but not in place of them).

In October 2023, Marj was told that Jess, (*pictured*) her 13 -and-a-half-year-old Springer Spaniel, was suffering from prostate cancer.

"My first reaction was to look for as much information as I could get, which quickly overwhelmed me; I didn't know what to do first. As a client of The Balanced Dog and a pupil at one of your Cooking for Dogs classes I asked for advice about recommended foods for dogs with cancer. I also consulted a naturopath who gave me advice on supplements and Chinese herbs.

"My vet has been great and incredibly supportive of using integrative therapies. She prescribed Jess medication including drugs for protection of his gut; and we decided to continue with his monthly Synovan injections to help with his arthritis."

In terms of nutrition, a low carbohydrate, high protein kibble is the cornerstone of Jess' diet with Marj cooking up lots of mixed green vegetables including kale, spinach, green beans, cauliflower, and broccoli. Shiitake mushrooms have recently been added, too.

Marj has organised Jess' medication into a daily pill organiser; her parents provide Jess with day care so he is never left unsupervised.



She devotes time each week to buying and cooking his vegetable mixtures and feeding these with food and in lick mats and other food toys. Smaller meals work best for Jess. At the time of writing, Jess is doing very well with a great appetite and interest in twice-daily walks.

An owner knows their dog best. It is also perfectly acceptable to consider your own lifestyle and personal circumstances in a cancer treatment decision. Treatments can be expensive and time-consuming; what is manageable for some may not be for others.

If treatment is not an option for your dog, most dogs are prescribed pain medications and prednisone for palliative care. Other management in the home might include special foods and hand-feeding, open access to outdoor areas, the use of incontinence pads, and substituting long walks with enrichment activities. 