

INFORMATION FOR PETS ON CHEMOTHERAPY

The medications used for chemotherapy are very potent. While they are designed to target your pet's cancer cells, the medications also effect normal cells and have the potential to cause serious side effects if not carefully monitored and administered. Chemotherapy generally consists of a series of medications given in a specific order. For the chemotherapy to be most effective, it is essential that we adhere to the prescribed schedule. Each week prior to the next round of medication it is necessary for us to check a CBC (complete blood count.) This allows us to monitor the effect of the medication on normal cells and helps us limit the more serious potential side effects. You should also monitor your pet at home for side effects (vomiting, diarrhea, inappetance, lethargy, bloody urine, abnormal bruising, fever, etc.) and call the clinic if you observe any abnormalities. You should keep a rectal thermometer at home so that you can take your pet's temperature if they are not feeling well. Unlike people, pets rarely loose their hair while on chemotherapy, although some cats will loose their whiskers and some pets are slow to regrow the hair in shaved areas.

While your pet is undergoing chemotherapy, you should take precautions to limit your potential exposure to the medications. Wear gloves when handling the medications or vomit, urine, or feces from your pet. Dish gloves can be used or you can purchase latex gloves from a pharmacy or the clinic. Pregnant women and children should not be responsible for administering the medications or cleaning up after your pet.

Below is a list of the medications commonly used for chemotherapy. Please review the information for the medications your pet is taking and call the clinic with any questions.

- q PREDNISONE—This medication is given in tablet form. It does not require any special handling or precautions. The side effects are generally mild and include increased thirst and urination, weight gain, and panting.
- q CYTOXAN (Cyclophosphamide)—This medication is also given in pill form. Because it is potentially toxic to your cells as well as your animal's cells, it is important to wear gloves when handling this drug. You should also wear gloves when cleaning up vomitus, urine, or feces. Do not break the pills in half. The agent is unevenly distributed through out the tablet so split pills do not necessarily contain the same amount of medication in each half and have the potential to increase human exposure to the drug. Possible side effects of this medication include vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy, and bloody urine. Animals on this medication should be encouraged to drink lots of water and to urinate frequently.
- q ELSPAR (Asparaginase)—This medication is given by injection at the clinic. In rare cases animals can have severe allergic reactions immediately after administration of this medication. Because of this, pets are pretreated with antihistamines prior to administration of Elspar. Additional side effects can include gastrointestinal signs and bleeding disorders.
- q VINCRISTINE—Most pets tolerate this drug very well, but potential side effects include bleeding disorders, constipation, depression, and neurologic problems. Vincristine must be given intravenously through a catheter while your pet is at the clinic.
- q ADRIAMYCIN (Doxorubicin)—This agent is also administered intravenously through a catheter. It has the potential to be very irritating to tissues if given outside the vein. This drug is the one most likely to cause side effects in your pet. Many animals feel sick for several days after treatment. The most common side effects are vomiting and diarrhea. Additional side effects can include bleeding problems, heart damage, lethargy or decreased appetite, and bone marrow suppression. Adriamycin is excreted in the urine for 3 to 7 days after treatment. It may cause the urine to be orange or red for 1 to 2 days after administration. You should avoid touching the urine and clean accidents up with plenty of water or a mild bleach solution for one week following treatment.