



Feline Mammary Tumors

Introduction: Mammary gland tumors are common in cats that are not spayed or that are spayed later in life. The protective effect of spaying cats is not as large as it is in dogs. However, it is clear that early spaying is also beneficial in preventing mammary tumors in cats. Treatment with megestrol acetate is also linked to the development of mammary tumors in animals.

Clinical Signs: Mammary tumors are similar to breast tumors in people. Usually no symptoms occur other than finding a “lump” when petting your cat. Uncommonly, mammary tumors can bleed or even become infected. Because some of these tumors are malignant, they can spread to other parts of the body and cause illness, loss of appetite, weight loss, trouble breathing and lethargy.

Diagnosis: The diagnosis of a mammary tumor relies primarily on evaluation of a biopsy. Unfortunately, mammary gland tumors in cats are almost always malignant. Typically, the smaller the tumor is at the time of diagnosis, the better the outcome. Further tests can be done to evaluate for metastasis (spread of cancer) and help determine your pet’s prognosis. These tests included x-rays of the thorax, abdominal ultrasound, fine needle aspirates of the mammary lymph nodes that drain the site of the tumor and bloodwork to assess the overall health of your pet.

Treatment: Surgical removal of the mammary gland tumor is the treatment of choice. However, even if the tumor is completely removed with surgery, your cat may develop another mammary tumor in the future or may have already had micrometastasis of the removed tumor. Chemotherapy or radiation therapy may also be offered for additional treatment. These treatment options would be done at a referral center that specializes in veterinary oncology. If you are interested in pursuing chemotherapy or radiation, we will gladly refer you to the oncologist at Blue Pearl Veterinary Partners here in Brentwood, TN.

Prognosis: Your pet’s prognosis depends entirely on the malignancy of the mammary tumor and the amount of metastasis present at the time of diagnosis. With malignant tumors, it is nearly impossible to say how fast the disease will progress and spread without treatment.