

My dog is having more frequent urination and sometimes it is bloody. My veterinarian says that she has tested her for a urinary tract infection and she doesn't seem to have one. She did an x-ray to look for a bladder stone but didn't see one. She mentioned that there is a possibility that she has bladder cancer and recommended another test. Is bladder cancer common in dogs? Can it be cured? Will it spread?

It sounds like your veterinarian has taken the right steps in trying to determine the cause of your dog's urinary problem. It is likely that the next test she is recommending is an abdominal ultrasound, to look at the bladder and the rest of the urinary tract. With ultrasound, your veterinarian is able to look at the bladder wall, evaluate if it looks thicker than normal and look for tumors along the wall of the bladder. If she does see a bladder tumor, a urinary catheter can be placed to try to "flush out" some of the cells from the tumor to try to diagnose what type it is.

Bladder tumors may be benign or malignant, but both can cause discomfort for a dog. Unfortunately, these tumors are usually not diagnosed until late in the disease process and are incurable at this time. While bladder cancer is rare in dogs (less than 2% of cancers), transitional cell carcinoma (TCC) is the most common type. The tumor usually grows at the trigone, where the bladder narrows and turns into the urethra. Due to this location, it is often difficult to remove a TCC bladder tumor. These tumors can spread to lymph nodes or other organs including the lungs and bones. It is not uncommon for the bladder tumor to have already spread at the time of diagnosis.

If surgery to remove or debulk the tumor is not an option, some specialists will place a metal stent in the urethra to keep it open, allowing urine to pass unimpeded by the tumor. Other than these surgical options, chemotherapy can extend the quality of life of a dog with TCC for an average of close to a year. A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug, Piroxicam, can slow the growth of the cancer when used alone or in combination with chemotherapy. If treated with Piroxicam alone, a dog may survive 6 months, on average, following diagnosis.

Hopefully, if you have an ultrasound exam done of your dog's bladder and a tumor is found, it is in an area where it can be removed. That will offer the best long-term success.

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