

Feline Nasal Lymphoma

What is a feline nasal lymphoma?

Nasal lymphoma is a cancer of a type of white blood cell called a lymphocyte. It is a unique type of lymphoma in that the tumor often remains confined to the nasal cavity. Thus, unlike other forms of lymphoma where systemic chemotherapy is the treatment of choice, nasal lymphoma often responds well to local radiation.

What are the clinical signs of nasal lymphoma?

Cats with nasal lymphoma often develop chronic nasal discharge, sneezing, and loud breathing. You may also notice a bulge or bump forming over the bridge of the nose. One or both eyes may become red or painful.

How is nasal lymphoma diagnosed?

A CT scan and biopsy are required to diagnose nasal lymphoma. In addition, about 20% of cats with nasal lymphoma have or develop lymphoma elsewhere in the body. Thus, prior to radiation treatment for nasal lymphoma, full staging with chest x-rays, abdominal ultrasound, and possibly samples of lymph nodes are required.

How is nasal lymphoma treated?

A definitive course of radiation therapy (19-22 treatments, given once a day over a course of 3-4 weeks) is the recommended treatment for feline nasal lymphoma. Each treatment requires general anesthesia, not because the treatment is painful, but to prevent movement during each treatment. Side effects can be significant, due to the long course and site of radiation, but most cats tolerate radiation therapy well. Typical effects seen include changes to the skin, the eyes, and the inside of the nose and mouth, depending on the path of the radiation field. These areas may become red and irritated and the hair in the area may not grow back or may change to white. If the eyes are in the field, cataracts, dry eye or corneal ulceration are possible. Supportive medications can be given to control pain, and nutritional support with a feeding tube may be discussed. Late, irreversible complications to non-healing tissues such as bone, muscle, and nerves are unlikely (<5% chance of occurring) but possible.

Since a certain percentage of cats with nasal lymphoma will go on to develop systemic disease, some oncologists recommend chemotherapy in addition to radiation therapy.

What is the prognosis for feline nasal lymphoma?

The average survival for cats with nasal lymphoma treated with radiation therapy is 1-2 years. If the tumor extends into the brain or to other areas of the body, survival time may be shorter, even with aggressive treatment.