

# ASK OUR VETERINARIANS

## Canine Mast Cell Tumors

Mast cell tumors are common skin tumors in dogs. About 21% of all skin masses in dogs are mast cell tumors. Mast cells are normal cells of the immune system that are mostly used to fight parasites. The cells then become cancerous and can group together anywhere in the body (commonly the skin) resulting in tumor formation. These skin tumors can look like just about anything. While mast cell tumors can affect any breed of dog, there are some breeds that are more predisposed. Boxers, English Bulldogs, Shar Peis, Labs, Golden Retrievers, Boston Terriers, and Cocker Spaniels are some of the breeds listed that may be predisposed.

Diagnosis of a mast cell tumor is relatively easy in most cases and requires an aspiration of the tumor with a needle. A few of the more difficult cases will actually require tissue biopsy for diagnosis, but this is rare.

Once the diagnosis of mast cell tumor is made, we will recommend surgery to remove the tumor. Once the tumor is removed, the mass will be submitted to the lab for biopsy, margins (did we remove all the tumor cells?) and grading. Grading allows us to know how aggressively the tumor will behave. Grade I is the least serious and is cured with surgery. Grade II is moderate, in some cases can be curative with surgery. The average survival time with surgical removal is at least 2 years. Grade III are the most aggressive and the survival time with surgery alone is usually only 4-5 months. Chemotherapy and radiation are other treatment options for the higher grade tumors.

Check your dog regularly for any unusual masses or growths. Should you find anything suspicious, contact your veterinarian right away.

**Submitted by: Dr. Kathleen Spencer**



Dr. Douglas Schmidt  
246-3611  
[www.pattonvethospital.com](http://www.pattonvethospital.com)



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