



CUTANEOUS LYMPHOMA

What is cutaneous lymphoma?

Cutaneous lymphoma is a variant of lymphoma that affects the skin, oral cavity (gums and lips) and foot pads. Cutaneous lymphoma is usually limited to the skin and mucous membranes, but may be a symptom of systemic (whole body) involvement.

What are the symptoms?

Cutaneous lymphoma can be solitary but often involves multiple skin sites and can present as nodules, plaques, or ulcers. In the early stages, dogs may experience scaling of the skin, hair loss, and itching. As the disease progresses, the skin becomes red, thickened, and ulcerated. Oral involvement can occur and appears as plaque-like lesions or nodules associated with the gums and lips. Cutaneous lymphoma can mimic severe bacterial, fungal, or auto-immune diseases of the skin.

How is it diagnosed?

Biopsy of the affected areas of skin is necessary to diagnosis cutaneous lymphoma; particularly in dogs that are not responding to treatment for presumptive bacterial or fungal skin disease. Special stains are required to determine T-cell versus B-cell lymphoma. Routine bloodwork is recommended to evaluate your pet's overall health prior to treatment. If systemic involvement is suspected, x-rays and/or ultrasound may be helpful to determine your pet's extent of disease.

How is it treated?

Treatment of cutaneous lymphoma depends on the extent of disease. Single lesions may be treated with surgery or radiation therapy, although new lesions may develop. Generalized cutaneous lymphoma is best treated with chemotherapy. B-cell cutaneous lymphomas often respond better than T-cell mycosis fungoides; however the response rate with chemotherapy is less than that seen with other forms of lymphoma. T-cell mycosis fungoides is often frustrating to treat, as it is often resistant to conventional chemotherapy drugs.



Cutaneous lymphoma appears to respond best to CCNU (lomustine) chemotherapy. Partial or complete regression of lesions may be seen with CCNU. Although many dogs have an initial good response to chemotherapy, the lesions often return or new lesions develop within a short period of time (3-5 months). Other drug therapies such as retinoids, asparaginase, and Doxil chemotherapy have also been used to treat cutaneous lymphoma with limited success. Topical chemotherapy may be used to treat solitary lesions, but is not practical for dogs with multiple sites of skin involvement. Prednisone may be prescribed to control itching and inflammation often associated with this disease.

What is the prognosis?

The long-term prognosis for cutaneous lymphoma is poor. Long-term control or “cure” is rare, even with chemotherapy. CCNU chemotherapy results in regression of lesions initially; however new lesions often develop within 3-5 months of starting treatment. Additional therapies are not always beneficial in obtaining remission. Many dogs are euthanized within 6 months of diagnosis, due to the discomfort associated with progressive ulceration, bleeding, and itching of lesions.