Nasal Tumors

What is it?

Nasal tumors of dogs and cats are usually locally aggressive malignant tumors. The most common tumor originating in the nasal cavity in dogs is adenocarcinoma, while lymphoma is the most common nasal tumor in cats.

Early symptoms may include difficulty breathing through the nose, noisy breathing, mucoid/bloody nasal discharge, sneezing, or facial swelling. Nasal tumors are slow to metastasize (spread); when they do, it is most commonly to regional lymph nodes or to the lungs. They are locally invasive tumors that eat away at surrounding bone and tissue and obstruct the nasal passage. As the disease progresses, nasal tumors may completely obstruct the nasal cavity, making it impossible for your animal to breathe through the nose. Invasion of the tumor into the brain is may occur in advanced stages, leading to neurological symptoms. The presence of a nasal tumor, its size, type and degree of invading surrounding tissues may be diagnosed by skull radiographs (x-rays), rhinoscopy, CT scan, and tumor biopsy.

How is it treated?

Radiation therapy is the most effective treatment option for nasal tumors in dogs and cats. Chemotherapy is also an option, especially for nasal lymphoma in cats. Piroxicam is a non-steroidal antiinflammatory drug that can be given to provide pain relief and increase survival time. Surgery is not curative and only performed if the tumor is small and located in the most rostral part of the nasal cavity, away from vital organs such as the eyes and the brain.

What symptoms may be present as the disease progresses?

Early stages symptoms may include:

- Nasal discharge – initially one-sided
- Sneezing with or without blood
- Noisy breathing
- Exercise intolerance
- Facial swelling
- Decreased appetite
- Weight loss

Late stages- persistent/worsening early stages symptoms and/or:

- Profuse nasal bleeding
- Facial deformity, abnormal eye position
- Facial pain
- Open mouth breathing
- Continuous panting – dogs
- Anorexia
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea – often black and tarry
- Loss of vision
- Depression, lethargy
- Seizures – if the tumor reaches the brain

Crisis – Immediate veterinary assistance needed regardless of the disease:

- Difficulty breathing
- Prolonged seizures
- Uncontrollable vomiting/diarrhea
- Sudden collapse
- Profuse bleeding – internal or external
- Unresponsive, comatose
- Crying/whining from pain*

*It should be noted that most animals have high threshold for pain. Any vocalization that is unusual for your pet may indicate her or his pain and anxiety have reached a severe level. Consult with a veterinarian immediately! [If possible, one that knows your pet].