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Hemangiosarcoma is an aggressive type of [cancer](#) that can affect organs where blood vessels are present. Unfortunately, this means that any part of your pet's body can be affected, since blood vessels are everywhere.

Signs of hemangiosarcoma in dogs

Even though hemangiosarcoma can occasionally develop in the [skin](#), it's most common in the internal organs, such as the spleen or the [liver](#). Because of this, most of our pets often don't show signs until their [condition](#) is advanced or sometimes critical. Signs usually occur after a [tumor](#) has developed in an internal organ and has ruptured, causing internal bleeding. The loss of blood or anemia (a low red blood cell count) causes:

- [Lethargy](#)
- [Difficulty breathing](#)
- [Pale gums](#)
- [Collapse](#) (in severe cases)

Depending on the situation, it can also cause extra heart beats.

Is my dog at risk for hemangiosarcoma?

All pets can be affected by hemangiosarcoma, but [large breed dogs](#) have the highest occurrence. They tend to be adults or [seniors](#). The cause is unknown, but may have a genetic origin.

Diagnosing hemangiosarcoma

The diagnosis of hemangiosarcoma usually starts with a [physical exam](#). The skin form can usually be felt by palpating (or feeling) a [lump](#) in the skin. In the case of a mass in the belly, your [veterinarian](#) may notice pale gums, [swelling](#) of the belly and may be able to obtain a

sample from the abdomen. Chest [X-rays](#) are recommended to help assess the severity and determine if there is spreading to the lungs. Abdominal ultrasound can be helpful. Full blood work is also recommended.

Treating hemangiosarcoma

Depending on the location, the tumor, the entire organ (e.g. the spleen) or part of the organ (e.g. part of the liver) can be removed. Postop chemotherapy is often recommended to increase survival time.

Removal of hemangiosarcoma is a major [surgery](#), so your dog will need to rest strictly. An [Elizabethan collar \(plastic cone\)](#) will prevent your dog from injuring the incision. Antibiotics and pain [medications](#) are usually administered for at least 7 days. A [diet](#) change may be recommended.

It is extremely rare to cure hemangiosarcoma. The average survival time with surgery alone, if internal organs are involved, is 3 to 6 months. If the spleen is involved and it has not ruptured, the outcome is better. If at the time of surgery, there is no visible metastasis (spreading of cancer) and the patient follows up with chemotherapy, we hope for a mean survival time of one year.

Nobody will force you to [choose chemo](#), but you need to be aware that without it, the survival time is greatly decreased.

Dealing with hemangiosarcoma

Although hemangiosarcoma is an aggressive cancer, it is important to remember that there are still options. As with all conditions, the sooner hemangiosarcoma is addressed, the more options you have and the lower the risk of metastasis is. Since the symptoms can be vague at first, if your dog is acting out of sorts in any way, the sooner you see your veterinarian, the better.

You may wonder: "Why bother for only a few more months, or even a year?" Well, a year may not seem much in human terms, but it is a long time in doggy years. Many of my clients have chosen surgery in spite of the odds. Interestingly, not a single one has regretted the decision. All of them were thankful for the

extra time they spent with their beloved dog.

Questions to ask your veterinarian

- Which test will help us confirm the diagnosis?
- Who are the best people to perform the surgery and chemo?
- How can we determine if the cancer has spread?

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian -- they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of your pets.