

OSTEOSARCOMA

Osteosarcoma is an aggressive bone cancer that frequently affects large-breed dogs. It usually forms in the bones of the limbs but can develop in the skull, spine, or ribcage. There are rare cases of this tumour arising in non-bony tissues like mammary glands and muscle. It is very painful and spreads rapidly. Osteosarcoma is the most common primary bone tumour of dogs and nearly 10,000 dogs are diagnosed with this cancer each year. Osteosarcoma accounts for 85% of all primary malignant bone tumours of dogs.

Recognising signs, understanding risk factors, and knowing about treatment options can help you give your dog a better quality of life, even with a cancer diagnosis.

Demographics, signs, and diagnosis

Osteosarcoma can affect any dog at any age, but there are some identifiable risk factors. These include:

- > Height (which often tracks with larger breeds)
- > Increased weight (another variable that can coincide with breed)
- > Older age

The most reported signs of osteosarcoma include:

- > Lameness
- > Swelling or “lump” growing on a limb
- > Sudden bone fracture

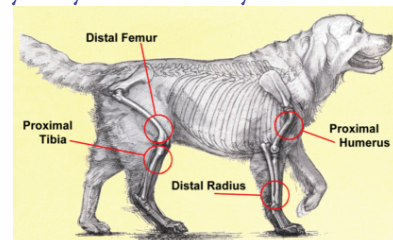
X-rays are helpful in making a diagnosis of osteosarcoma and to rule out other common causes of lameness. Unlike bacterial or fungal infections, which can affect both bones of a particular joint,

osteosarcoma does not cross a joint – this can be a tip-off that a patient has a bone tumour and not an infection. Despite physical examination findings and X-rays suggestive of cancer, it can still be unclear if a bone abnormality is due to osteosarcoma, a different type of cancer, or another disease affecting bone, such as infection. A bone biopsy may be necessary to make a definitive diagnosis.

Treatment

The treatment of osteosarcoma almost always begins with amputation of the affected limb. Although many owners are understandably upset and concerned about amputating a limb, most dogs do very well with surgery. Because osteosarcoma is a painful disease, amputation also provides relief from unrelenting discomfort that is hard to control with pain medication alone. However, the prognosis remains poor with surgery alone; 90% of dogs will die of this disease within one year if surgery is the only treatment attempted.

Chemotherapy can help prolong remissions, with some dogs living years after amputation and chemotherapy. But these success stories tend to be the outliers, not the norm, and odds are still poor for long-term survival. Osteosarcoma spreads quickly, usually to the lungs, and nearly 90% of dogs have metastases by the time of diagnosis, even if there are no obvious signs of disease spread.



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