



Oral Surgery-Oral Cancer Surgery

Cancer is a scary word – especially when you or a loved one has been diagnosed with cancer. At Sacramento Veterinary Dental Services we are committed to maintaining your pet’s best quality of life by helping you to make treatment decisions based on our knowledge of your pet’s disease, overall health, and working with you closely to help manage any pain they may experience.

Oral cancer in dogs and cats is unfortunately fairly common. We can often provide substantial pain relief, if not a complete cure, by surgically removing either part or the entire tumor in the mouth. The full course of treatment will depend highly on the type of tumor we are dealing with, whether the tumor has spread anywhere, and the overall health of your pet.

The first step in treating the mass in your dog or cat’s mouth is to diagnose the tumor type by taking a sample of it and submitting it for biopsy. We will also perform dental radiographs to get an idea of how invasive the growth is. This helps us decide how much normal tissue around the tumor will need to be removed to completely eliminate any tumor cells that may be outside the main mass. In some cases we may recommend more advanced imaging, such as a CT Scan or MRI, to be confident in our surgical plan.

Once we know the type of oral tumor, whether it is benign or malignant, and where the growth is located, we may recommend surgical removal. Most oral tumors involve the underlying jawbone. This means that to cure your pet, removal of part of the jaw may be indicated. This sounds like a very scary procedure – but although it is an advanced procedure that requires careful treatment planning and delicate and precise surgical skills, the end results are often very successful. Most pets have minimal cosmetic changes, and huge improvements in quality of life and long-term prognosis.

A surgery that involves removing part of the upper jaw is called a maxillectomy. A surgery that removes part of the lower jaw is called a mandibulectomy. Depending on where the tumor is located, we may be required to perform a partial or total maxillectomy or mandibulectomy. During this procedure, your pet will be under general anesthesia and will receive local nerve blocks to numb the surgical area. We use sterile techniques to clean the skin and oral cavity prior to surgery. Most often the surgical incisions are in the oral cavity, which means the skin on their face and jaws is untouched. Because of this, they often do not need a cone after surgery since there are no stitches to scratch. After we make our incision, we carefully cut around the tumor and, if necessary, through the bone. The tumor will be removed with a margin of normal healthy tissue and we make sure that all potential sources of bleeding are controlled, clean the area thoroughly, and then place dissolvable stitches to close the surgical site. These sutures take between 2-4 weeks to dissolve. After surgery patients recover with us for at least one full day. After



surgery they will be receiving strong pain medications, and will be discharged when they are eating on their own or have made enough progress that we believe they are ready to be nursed at home.

Your pet will require soft food only for the first two weeks after surgery. This may be a canned diet, or their normal kibble soaked in water or broth until it is a mushy consistency. We also recommend removing all toys and avoiding oral play for two weeks, and restricting their activity to leash walks only so that they can rest, recover and heal. They will be prescribed pain medication to help control postoperative pain.

We recommend two and four week recheck examinations after surgery to monitor the healing process. We also make sure that the tumor was entirely removed by sending it to a pathologist for analysis and monitoring the surgery site. Depending on the type and stage of cancer this may result in a cure of your pet's cancer. Many of our oral surgery patients eat the same night of their procedure or the following day. Depending on the location and extent of surgery, we may need to discuss follow-up therapy to correct changes in occlusion. However, other long-term side effects are rare. Most patients take 1-2 weeks to adjust to their new situation, but many patients can return to normal activities such as retrieving the paper or catching a Frisbee. They can eat and drink happily, and live life as though nothing ever happened. Throughout this whole process, we will be there to help guide you to the best of our knowledge so that we can keep your pet happy and comfortable for as long as possible.