



# Ask the Vet

**Q: My veterinarian diagnosed my pet with cancer and recommended I see a veterinary oncologist. I didn't realize they had oncologists for animals. Is it necessary that I see one? What makes them different from my regular veterinarian?**

**Q: The treatment goal in veterinary oncology places emphasis on improving the patient's quality of life rather than a cure, which is the focus in human oncology. In general, chemotherapy agents are designed to kill all rapidly growing cells which include cancer cells and normal cells in the body (namely the cells of the bone marrow and intestines). Although the treatment options are similar between human and veterinary oncology (chemotherapy and radiation therapy), the difference is in the intensity of the dose and dosing schedule. Due to the lower dosages and intensity of treatments, less than 20% of veterinary oncology patients experience side effects after chemotherapy. These side effects may include: loss of appetite, vomiting, or diarrhea (generally 3-5 days after therapy) and a drop in the white blood cell count (generally 7 days after therapy). However, these signs are typically mild and self-limiting and resolve with supportive care at home. Less than 5 percent of our patients require hospitalization after treatment. We typically try to prevent these side effects with medications sent home at the time of treatment rather than treat them once they begin. If side effects do occur, the chemotherapy dose can be reduced to prevent similar episodes at the next treatment. In contrast to humans, most dogs and cats do not experience hair loss. More drug specific side effects will be discussed during your consultation with the oncologist.**

**Q: The walking path that I take my dog on every day is right by high-tension wires. I've heard that exposure to areas like that can cause cancer. Is this true?**

**Q: Most of the time, the cause of your pet's cancer cannot be identified. The role of environmental pollutants and the presence of high voltage power lines in the development of cancer have been investigated, and thus far, a direct link has not been established. Some cancers result from infection with a virus such as feline leukemia virus (FeLV) and feline lymphoma. In other cases, there may be a genetic component as certain cancers are more common in a given breed or species.**

## About Rebecca Risbon, VMD, DACVIM (Oncology):

Dr. Risbon joined the staff of the Veterinary Specialty & Emergency Center (VSEC) in 2009 as the staff oncologist. As a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (Oncology), Dr. Risbon completed a 3-year residency in oncology and passed a series of national qualifying examinations in the fields of basic cancer biology, chemotherapy, and radiation oncology. She currently lives in New Jersey with her fiancé, two black labs (Franklin and Willowbee), and her cat (Guinness).

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