



Radiation Therapy for Dogs and Cats

Frequently Asked Questions

Radiation therapy is a form of localized treatment that is used with the goal of killing cancer cells. In some cases, radiation prevents tumor regrowth. In other cases, it can help shrink or slow the growth of a tumor for a period of time. Radiation is focused on the area where the tumor is located. It is not typically used on the whole body.

When is radiation therapy used?

Radiation therapy is typically used in the following circumstances in dogs and cats:


- For pets with tumors that have been incompletely removed at surgery to reduce the risk of regrowth, for example incompletely removed soft tissue sarcomas and mast cell tumors, brain tumors
- For pets with non-surgical tumors in which the goal is to delay further growth and control clinical signs (i.e., nasal tumors)
- To provide pain relief (i.e., bone cancers)


How is radiation therapy performed in veterinary patients?

Different radiation protocols exist depending on the tumor type and the goal of therapy. These range from daily treatments Monday through Friday for three to four weeks (definitive radiation therapy) to treatments given once weekly for four to six weeks (palliative radiation therapy), or treatments given once daily for three days (stereotactic radiation therapy).

For some tumor types, advanced imaging with a CT scan is necessary to plan radiation treatments. Each radiation therapy treatment requires a short period of general anesthesia, as your pet must lay perfectly still.

MedVet Dayton does not offer radiation therapy at our location; however, our medical oncology team can discuss radiation therapy treatment options with you and help you schedule at our MedVet Columbus or Cincinnati locations.

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How do pets tolerate radiation therapy?

Radiation therapy is performed very precisely to target the tumor cells and avoid the normal surrounding tissues, but it is not possible to protect all the normal tissues around the tumor site. Therefore, side effects can be seen. Radiation therapy is planned very carefully for each patient to keep the risk of all complications as low as possible.

Acute side effects occur during and shortly after the radiation therapy protocol. These side effects are temporary and can typically be managed with topical and oral medications. Depending on the area being treated, these may include:

- Skin redness and peeling
- Hair loss
- Inflammation of the mouth
- Dry eye

Late side effects can occur six months or later after a radiation protocol is completed. These may include:

- Cataract formation
- Muscle fibrosis
- Neurological changes

Overall, most veterinary patients tolerate radiation therapy very well. During your pet's medical oncology consult we may discuss potential radiation options for your pet, and we will answer any questions you have regarding radiation therapy.