What to Feed or Not to Feed?

What to feed or not feed, that is the question! Especially when your veterinarian is using the dreaded, “C” word about your dog. We can feel defeated before we even start. Cancer is the leading cause of death of our beloved canines. So, is there something you can do to help support your dog through the cancer diagnosis? Absolutely! A variety of diets are now available-along with supplements-that you can give your dog to enhance their quality (and hopefully quantity) of life.

Veterinarians who had studied canine cancer have long known that cancer alters dog’s metabolism. Dogs with cancer process carbohydrates, proteins, and fats in a very different manner than healthy dogs do. Cancer cachexia, which occurs in human beings, is believed to also occur in our canine population diagnosed with cancer. Cancer chachexia can cause decreased ability to respond to treatment and can shorten survival time. So, how do we get the goo foods into our canines to help them while they fight cancer? Cancer cells metabolize carbohydrates through a process called anaerobic glycolysis, which forms lactase as a byproduct. The dog’s body must then expend energy to convert the lactate into a usable form. The tumor gains energy from carbohydrates, while the dog deals with the energy loss. So we need to look into feeding a good diet that sustains our dog’s energy-especially at a time when their immune system is fighting cancer. You might also choose to go kibble free even if your dog is not fighting cancer and get to a diet that is more “carnivore” friendly. Our dogs after all are descended from wolves and they are carnivorous. Even though we’ve been feeding dogs kibble based foods for years, our dogs have a distinct carnivorous bias in their DNA. Think of how a cow (herbivore) chews their food-they grind from side to side. Now think about how your dog chews-they chop and cannot grind as they do not have flat back teeth like cows, but have pointed sharp back teeth. Your dog’s teeth are the perfect tool for cutting meat into smaller sizes.

There are a variety of diets you can choose from and frankly, it can be quite confusing. Everyone has an opinion on what to feed and what not to feed. There is no perfect “cancer” diet. Most recent studies suggest that severely limiting the carbohydrates in your canine’s diet is one of the best options for dogs fighting cancer. Understanding how the basics of how carbohydrates can affect your dog’s cancer is of the utmost importance. Numerous studies have demonstrated that a high fat, low carbohydrate diet contributes to a higher probability of remission-along with conventional treatment-can lead to longer survival time. Veterinarian Dr. Ogilvie (Coloradio State University) has shown huge progress in developing a diet plan that can reduce the effects of cachexia by nourishing the dog and not the cancer. The basic framework suggests that the diet should be comprised of a relatively low amount of simple carbohydrates, modest amounts of fats (especially omega 3 fatty acids), and adequate amounts highly digestible protiens.

The Bare Basics:

1. All ingredients should be fresh, easily digested, and highly palatable, with good taste and smell. Dogs that undergo chemotherapy or other treatments may lose their appetites just like us humans. So enticing your dog to eat can be done with food that smells fresh. If you have a dog that just won’t eat, consult your vet as there are supplements such as, B-12, etc, that can help boost their appetite. The correct supplement and dosage should be determined by a professional.
2. Organic foods. Simply put, the cleaner the food source, the better. No chemicals, by-products, etc. Always try to source locally, but in the event you cannot, there are plenty of places on the internet to purchase from.
3. Fresh, organic meats, either raw or cooked. If you are looking into the world of raw feeding, but are not able to do the homemade raw diet (B.A.R.F.) there are other alternatives such as, Steve’s Raw, Primal Raw, or the Darwin Diet. We have personally used the Darwin Diet and have had good success. However, it will require a prescription from your vet for a cancer based diet. For those who do not want to deal with the freezing and thawing of raw diets, but want to feed raw, there is The Honest Kitchen where you purchase dehydrated raw and simply re-hydrate to use.
4. Fish oil supplements. Omega 3 fatty acids have been linked both to inhibiting tumor growth and strengthening the immune system. Fish oil may be more readily absorbed by a dog than flaxseed oil. \*Remember to refrigerate the salmon oil after opening!
5. Vitamin C, dark leafy greens, and broccoli. These items are good for all dogs with or without a cancer diagnosis. Broccoli specifically has phytochemicals that are thought to stimulate anti-cancer enzymes. Again fresh cooked is always best, but not always possible.
6. Bone Broth. Whether you make it at home or purchase it for your dog, bone broth is a great source of nutrition for a dog with cancer or even our senior pets. It is easy to make and a good recipe can be found at this web site: http:www.rover.com/blog/bone-broth-for-dogs-benefits-how-to/

So, where can you find these foods? The internet is where I shop for most of my dog’s nutritional needs. Web sites such as Chewy.com, Amazon.com, and sources for organic meats are great to shot at. Always try to check your area for local sources first. It is highly recommended that you consult with a professional for your dog’s nutritional needs during an illness. I have found that Chinese herbs can be helpful, so check with holistic veterinarians in your area, and consult with your own veterinarian before you embark on any dietary or supplement change. Re the best all you and yoru dog have in the fight against cancer. In the end, do your research, find out what you are comfortable with and above all, spend time with your dog. The quality of life is so important and especially at a time when your dog is fighting cancer. Remember every cancer is different and every dog is different. Consult with a professional and then make up your mind as to the path you will take with your dog.

On a more personal note, some of you may know that Carren’s dog, Bitty was diagnosed with Hemangiosarcoma (a particular nasty form of canine cancer frequesntly found in the spleen). Upon diagnosis, Carren to Bitty off her regular diet and fed her Darwin’s anti-cancer diet (raw pre-prepared food sent frozen to her home) and Bitty defied the odds and lived a good quality of life for almost a year after her diagnosis. Remember, we can affect our dog’s health by what choose to feed or not to feed.

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