

# If This Grows or Changes, Please See Your Vet in the Next 24 Hours

It's usually not so urgent you need to get to an emergency care center. On the other hand, it's wise to get them in to see your vet within 24 hours. Your vet can perform this test to see what's going on underneath the surface. And that makes all the difference in how you treat it.

Reviewed by [Dr. Becker](#)

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- A very common condition in older pets, especially dogs, is the appearance of growths in or just under the skin
- Most of these growths are benign, however, if you notice a lump or bump on your pet that is changing in size or appearance, it's important to make an appointment with your veterinarian
- A fine needle aspirate should be performed on all suspicious growths to determine what types of cells are involved and whether surgery is warranted
- Remove only cancerous growths and those that are compromising a pet's mobility or quality of life
- There are steps you can take as a pet parent to help your dog or cat avoid skin growths throughout life

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Just as aging human skin changes with the onset of wrinkles, age spots, skin flaps and other irregularities, so too does the skin of our animal companions. One of the most common conditions in older pets, especially dogs, are growths that develop in or just beneath the skin.

Most of the time, these lumps and bumps are harmless, though they can be unsettling and ugly. However, they are extremely common, and in fact, each year they appear in the top 10 list of reasons pet parents take their senior dogs to the veterinarian.

## When to Call Your Veterinarian

It's important, as your pet's body changes with age, to have new lumps and bumps evaluated by your veterinarian. It's rare that a growth requires emergency action, however, occasionally a mass like an abscess or cyst may require urgent care.

If your pet is really uncomfortable or you know the mass is growing or changing, you'll want to make an appointment with your vet, preferably within 24 hours. But rarely is it necessary to visit an emergency animal hospital or make an emergency appointment with your vet because of a lump or bump.

When you find a growth, monitor it. If it is growing or changing quickly, it's best to see a veterinarian sooner rather than later. If you notice, for example, a discoloration on the skin or what looks like a skin tag that doesn't get bigger or change over the course of days, weeks or months, then just mention it to your vet at your pet's next **wellness exam**.

But again, if the area is changing rapidly, you do need to have your pet seen as soon as possible. Your vet should perform a fine needle aspirate, which involves inserting a needle into the lump, extracting cells and typically, sending samples to a pathologist for evaluation and a preliminary diagnosis.

## **The Importance of a Fine Needle Aspirate for Growths on or in the Skin**

The importance of the fine needle aspirate procedure can't be overstated. Your veterinarian doesn't know what's going on inside that mass unless he or she extracts some cells from it and evaluates them. Another reason for a fine needle aspirate is there are some types of tumors that need to be excised very widely.

For example, mast cell tumors need to be surgically removed in most cases, and they need to be excised with a very wide margin (removing the tumor plus surrounding tissue). If a vet does a very small cosmetic cut to remove only the mass and it turns out to be mast cell cancer, fingers of tumor cells can be left behind to invade deeper tissue.

Getting a confirming diagnosis with a fine needle aspirate will help identify surgical margins to take based on the type of tumor. This is an extremely important aspect of tumor removal. Another reason for a fine needle aspirate is that some tumors require the expertise of a soft tissue surgeon.

## **2 Rules for Treating Growths**

For many lumps and bumps, removal is totally unnecessary because the masses are benign and there's nothing to worry about as long as they don't impinge on the pet's quality of life or longevity. As long as the mass isn't cancer and doesn't impede the animal's movement or quality of life, there's no reason other than aesthetics to remove it.

The risks of anesthesia and surgery far outweigh the benefit of having a lump-free pet. Here are two rules for treating growths:

1. If the fine needle aspirate shows there's something dangerous brewing, possibly cancer, then surgically removing the mass will give the pet the best chance to be cancer-free. So off to surgery we go.
2. If the fine needle aspirate shows the lump is benign, which means there are no abnormal cells and nothing to worry about, then you can leave things alone.

Ask your vet to mark down exactly where the mass is, the size, the date and the results of the fine needle aspirate on the pet's body chart. They can then measure the mass and check for changes at future appointments.

The only reason other than cancer that surgery is recommended for lumps or bumps is if the patient's quality of life is compromised. For example, skin tags that grow on the margins of a dog's or cat's eyes are entirely benign, but because they are on the eyelid, as the pet blinks it can cause corneal irritation and pain.

In a situation like that, even though the mass is not cancerous, if the surface of the eye is being affected surgical removal is recommended because it's causing the animal discomfort. Another example is warts on dogs. They can be very itchy, and a dog can spend the entire day licking and chewing the area. The pet parent returns home from work to find a big, open, bleeding wound on the dog.

The wart itself is benign and harmless, but the patient's quality of life is suffering because of the itching and self-wounding. This is another situation in which removing the wart is recommended.

# How to Help Pets Avoid Skin Growths as They Age

To give your pet the best chance to avoid both benign and malignant lumps and bumps throughout her life and especially as she gets older, it's important to keep her in good physical condition while also supporting her metabolism, immune and lymphatic systems and organs of detoxification.

- Feed a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate, fresh food diet, preferably organic and without GM ingredients. This is the type of diet that will generate the least amount of metabolic stress in your pet, provide needed moisture and insure the highest level of biologic assimilation and digestion.
- Provide fresh, filtered drinking water for your pet that doesn't contain fluoride, chlorine, heavy metals or other contaminants.
- Be mindful of your pet's BMI (body mass index) and keep him at a healthy weight with portion-controlled meals and plenty of physical exercise.
- Make sure your pet is breathing clean, smoke- and fume-free air in your home. Replace chemical household cleaners with all-natural options.
- Consider periodic detoxification, since it's virtually impossible to protect your pet from all sources of toxins.
- Spoil your pet with circulatory enhancing therapies such as massage and chiropractic treatments that assist in detoxification.
- Take care not to over-vaccinate or over-medicate your pet. This includes avoiding all unnecessary vaccines, veterinary drugs and chemical flea/tick preventives.

## Sources and References

[VetStreet September 30, 2016](#)

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