

Feline Low-Grade Gastrointestinal (GI) Lymphoma

What is a feline low-grade GI lymphoma?

In general, lymphoma is a cancer of a type of white blood cell called a lymphocyte. Low-grade GI lymphoma is the most common type of lymphoma in cats, and it often develops after several years of inflammatory bowel disease.

What are the clinical signs of low-grade GI lymphoma?

Cats with low-grade GI lymphoma often have mild to moderate vomiting and weight loss for several weeks, to months or years before diagnosis. Sometimes they will experience chronic diarrhea as well.

How is low-grade GI lymphoma diagnosed?

Biopsies of the intestine are required for a definitive diagnosis of low-grade GI lymphoma. These can be acquired through an exploratory surgery, or sometimes an upper GI scope with biopsies is sufficient. Prior to these procedures an abdominal ultrasound is recommended to evaluate the thickness of the GI tract, to look for enlarged lymph nodes, and other areas of disease.

How is low-grade GI lymphoma treated?

Because of the chronic indolent disease course, treatment is chronic and consists of oral chlorambucil/leukeran and prednisolone given at home.

Chlorambucil and prednisolone are well tolerated. In the event these oral medications fail to control the cancer, there are several intravenous chemotherapy options.

What is the prognosis for feline low-grade GI lymphoma?

Remission times are broad but generally good, and range from 1-3 years. Cats with this disease are typically on treatment for the remainder of their lives.

In a small proportion of cats, this disease will morph into a large cell, aggressive GI lymphoma. Unfortunately, this is very difficult to treat even with injectable chemotherapy.