

# Feline High-Grade Gastrointestinal (GI) Lymphoma

## What is a feline high-grade GI lymphoma?

In general, lymphoma is a cancer of a type of white blood cell called a lymphocyte. High-grade GI lymphoma specifically is an aggressive form of cancer in cats, which is often wide spread at diagnosis. It typically involves several areas of the GI tract and can involve multiple lymph nodes, the spleen, liver, and the bone marrow and blood. Treatment of this disease is aimed at improving quality of life through weekly chemotherapy.

## What are the clinical signs of high-grade GI lymphoma?

Cats with high-grade GI lymphoma will suddenly develop vomiting, diarrhea, weight loss, and lethargy. They are usually quite ill and the symptoms can be dramatic.

## How is high-grade GI lymphoma diagnosed?

In any cat that has signs consistent with high-grade GI lymphoma, the first diagnostic step is an abdominal ultrasound. This allows evaluation of the GI tract for masses, involvement of local lymph nodes, involvement of the liver and/or the spleen. A sample via a fine needle aspirate or biopsy is required for diagnosis. Full bloodwork is also required and may result in a diagnosis if there is involvement of the blood.

## How is high-grade GI lymphoma treated?

If there is a solitary mass, surgical removal of the mass may be recommended. In addition to surgery, or in lieu of surgery, chemotherapy is the treatment of choice. The most aggressive protocol, CHOP, involves the administration of four drugs in sequence once a week (vincristine, Cytoxan, doxorubicin and prednisone) for up to 6 months. Other less intensive, though typically somewhat less effective, options are available.

## What is the prognosis for feline high-grade GI lymphoma?

Unfortunately, high-grade lymphoma of the GI tract is very aggressive and can be very difficult to treat. Our main goal with treatment is to control clinical signs and improve quality of life for as long as possible. Even with aggressive chemotherapy as described above, only about 30% of cats respond to treatment and typically their survival time is 2-3 months. A very small percentage of cats who completely respond to chemotherapy can survive for close to a year with treatment, but the number of cats that fall into this category is small.