

SCAR REVISION TO REMOVE REMNANT TUMOR CELLS:**A larger surgery to attempt a surgical cure**

Overview—“I don’t understand what a tumor scar revision is ; please help me understand the condition and the treatment.”

You may hear the following terms: lump, growth, mass, malignant tumor, benign tumor. They all refer to a similar thing. Technically, these are “neoplastic” tissues or “tumors”—cells of normal tissues/organs that have become abnormal and unregulated and start dividing like crazy. They multiply over and over until they form a mass of abnormal tissue—a tumor.

If the cells are wimpy, they will just grow and grow inside a capsule and will NOT stick fingers of bad tissue out into normal tissue or send stray cells to invade other organs. We call these Benign Tumors.

If the cells are more aggressive, they grow and grow and stick fingers out into surrounding structures and/or send invading cells to other organs like liver, lungs, lymph nodes. We call these Malignant Tumors.

Surgery is usually a treatment option for some of these tumors—it is a treatment of “local disease” (i.e. the mass and the spreading fingers) but will not treat or prevent the invader cells spreading thru the body (“distant disease”).

For these locally aggressive tumors that have their “fingers” spreading into the surrounding tissues, the first surgical removal may not “get it all”. The pathologist tells us this on the biopsy report from the tissues we submit. If this concern is raised based on this information, a second surgery may be beneficial to remove a larger area of tissue around the previous incision/scar site with the goal of removing these remnant tumor cells.

“Why is this procedure being recommended for my pet?”

The benefit of removing the incision/scar and surrounding tissue now (versus “waiting and seeing” if the tumor re-grows at the original site) is that studies have demonstrated a better “cure” potential if we address these remnant cells right away.

“What options do I have to treat my pet’s current condition?”

The surgical option is to remove a larger portion of potentially diseased tissues, reconstruct the area with any necessary ancillary surgical manipulations at the same time, and submit the removed tissues for another analysis.

Some tumor types may benefit from radiation therapy to “sterilize” a surgical site with remnant cells. The type of tumor dictates whether this a preferred method or less ideal than a second surgery.

A conservative “wait and see” approach is always an option; the tumor type (and sometimes the “grade”) as well as the challenges of larger surgical procedure and side effects are all balanced when decision-making about what to do when remnant tumor cells may remain after initial tumor removal.

“What postoperative complications do I need to know and understand when considering this surgery?”

Skin incision-related problems are the most common postoperative complications. These can be really minor with a slight gap and more crusting than hoped for during healing. Other times, this can be a major event with the need for additional surgery to correct a major skin defect. (And a spread of variations on either end of that major-minor spectrum.) Protecting the surgery site with bandaging or other covering (dog bodysuit, etc.) can definitely help prevent these skin incision-related problems.

If the tumor needs to be removed from a location that is close to important structures or movable structures, complications may be related to those nearby structures (such as eyes or legs or anus, etc.)

“Are there situations when the surgical outcome is not what we hoped it would be?”

Often when removing a larger area of skin and underlying tissues, there will be some impact on surrounding structures (i.e. an ear or eyelid will be pulled out of symmetry or a digit will need to be removed with the additional tissues). Some of the concerns specific to the location of the surgery are cosmetic only and others will impact lifestyle; how these concerns apply to each patient is very individual and needs specific discussion to properly set your expectations.

“How is my pet’s life and lifestyle likely to change after this procedure?”

Often the second surgical procedure improves the prognosis for a cure, and is a major driver when deciding to proceed. The other things to balance in the decision are “best guess” return of tumor prognosis, the impact the second larger surgery will have on each specific patient, and general health of each patient.

“Are there things I can do to prepare myself, my home and/or my pet for this procedure?”

If tumor removal will involve the body or legs, bodysuits or leg/foot coverings can be very helpful with postoperative management. Many products are available online; explore options once the surgical plan is in place.

Outpatient surgery and anesthesia can be uncomfortable, painful, disorienting, and frustrating experiences for animals; watching your pet work through the early postoperative period and recover from anesthesia and pain medications can be worrisome, scary and frustrating for pet owners. The vast majority of the time this period of difficulty is brief, and *your pet is actually more comfortable and secure at home with you*. Sometimes it doesn’t feel like that at two in the morning when your pet is anxious and not consolable, and you are unsure of what to do. You always have the option of transporting your pet to a 24-hour veterinary facility postoperatively. If you do not want to have your pet home in the first few days postoperatively, please advise your primary care veterinary staff. They will provide contact information for a local 24-hour veterinary facility and help get an estimate for the ongoing care.

It is important that you have proper expectations about this procedure; your experience and your pet’s outcome will benefit greatly. Please discuss this information with your veterinarian when working through the decision-making process regarding **Scar Revision surgery for remnant tumor cells**.

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