 Transcript:

Lumps and Bumps – Part 2

Sebaceous Adenoma

The second type of benign lump and bump that I want to discuss is sebaceous adenomas. Sebaceous adenomas are cutaneous warts; they’re non-viral, which means they don’t go away with a functional immune system. Sebaceous adenomas really are benign tumors – that’s a scary word to use, but there’s nothing to worry about here because it’s benign, and there’s no cancer involved. The sebaceous or oil gland of your dog’s skin can begin overproducing oil, and the skin around the tissue becomes bigger and bigger.

Sebaceous adenomas can become quite big, and you can differentiate sebaceous adenoma from the viral wart papilloma by sebaceous adenomas being oily. Oftentimes when you squeeze them, there’s this clear oil that’s extruded from the pores. Sometimes there are little tufts of hair coming out of a sebaceous adenoma. Because they do secrete oil, sometimes there’s a scabbing that can form. Oftentimes they can be a little itchy, so dogs can begin to itch them, which can also account for self-trauma and secondary scabbing. Sebaceous adenomas are, of course, benign and nothing to worry about.

The only time I would ever recommend that you consider removing a sebaceous adenoma is if it’s in a bad location and is growing to a point that it’s bothersome to the dog. If it’s on an extremity and if the dog will not leave it alone, removing that benign lump or bump may be indicated because your dog’s quality of life is dramatically decreased, because of the amount of licking and chewing they’re doing on the sebaceous adenoma.

In my practice, I make a note on the body chart that it’s a sebaceous adenoma, and leave it alone. I don’t recommend that you work the equation backwards, which means some veterinarians would say, “My gosh, I don’t know what that is.” If your veterinarian doesn’t know that it’s a sebaceous adenoma by just looking at it, by all means do a fine needle aspirate. Remove some cells with a tiny needle, send it off for evaluation through pathology service, and they’ll be able to tell you, “Yup, it’s a benign sebaceous adenoma and nothing to worry about. Leave it alone.”

What I don’t recommend is that your veterinarian says, “Ooh I don’t know what that is. Let’s anesthetize your pet and remove it before we know what’s going on,” all to find out it’s benign and probably didn’t need to come off anyway.
Meibomian Gland Adenoma

The next tumor type that I want to discuss is a meibomian gland adenoma. A meibomian gland adenoma is basically a sebaceous cyst around the eyelids. Meibomian glands are tiny glands on the upper and lower lids of dogs. They can happen to cats, too, but much more frequently noted in dogs. Meibomian gland adenomas are benign and nothing to worry about. But they’re actually the most common type of benign tumor that I do remove at my animal hospital. Let me tell you why.

Of course, as you know, I don’t advocate removing benign lumps and bumps, but meibomian gland adenomas (also called meibomian gland cysts, eyelid warts, or eyelid tumors), although benign, can grow to a size that can begin to irritate the cornea. What typically happens is you’re looking at your dog, and you realize there’s a tiny pin point of eruption on the upper or lower lid. If it stays an eruption and your veterinarian identifies it as not a big deal (it looks like a whitehead, almost), leave it alone. If your veterinarian says it’s growing and you’re able to note that your dog starts not blinking symmetrically but with that eye more frequently, your dog has recognized that there’s something there. If that benign cyst grows to the point that it’s rubbing on your dog’s cornea, that’s when your dog’s quality of life can be impaired. In terms of corneal pain it’s pretty intense, and we do recommend that you move it not because it’s cancer, but because your dog’s quality of life is going to be poor, having to deal with an open wound on its cornea. Surgically removing that eyelid cyst is important.

Sometimes, to be honest, that’s easier said than done. Sometimes, these meibomian gland cysts are very tiny when you look at your pet, but down below the lid, they’re huge. In those instances, it’s really important that you’re able to ask your veterinarian if he or she feels confident in removing it. Just snipping off the superficial eruption or the part that you see won’t always cure the problem. You can take out the top part that’s visible, but unless you get the meibomian gland – the part of the follicle that’s producing oil and some of this inflammation – that eyelid cyst will return. Oftentimes, veterinarians will refer these eyelid tumors to a veterinary ophthalmologist or soft tissue surgeon to be able to do some fancy wedge resections and some eyelid reconstruction to be able to effectively remove the entire benign tumor.

In my practice, I don’t automatically remove any eyelid tumors. We watch them. In fact, I saw a patient yesterday, a 15-year-old golden retriever that has a huge eyelid wart. She is a not a candidate for anesthesia. You can tell that it’s bothersome to her, because she makes a lot of mucus in that eye and she blinks more frequently. What we’re doing is we’re lubricating that eye with an over-the-counter eye lubricant called GenTeal. I’m asking the owner to just keep that cornea well-lubricated three to four times a day with a water-based lubricant that will allow that wart to slide over the top of the cornea without creating abrasion or pain. Although removing it would probably be the best choice, she’s not a candidate for anesthesia, and we’re
not interested in anesthetizing her for a benign eyelid lump. So we’re just lubricating her cornea to improve her quality of life.

**Lipoma**

The next type of lump and bump that I would like to address is a lipoma. Lipomas are benign fatty masses that are incredibly common in dogs. The traditional veterinary community – the non-holistic veterinary community – absolutely will say that there is no breed, sex, or age predisposition for lipomas. And it’s true all dogs can form lipomas – young, old, spayed, neutered, fat, or thin. However, holistic veterinarians will absolutely say that we’ve been able to see a correlation between how big lipomas are and how many lipomas a dog has with their overall vitality status, including the dog’s ability to metabolize fat. If your dog doesn’t have ample, adequate, vibrant, thriving metabolism, what tends to happen is dogs tend to lay down fat in glumps.

You and I as people, when we gain weight, we gain weight a little bit everywhere. When dogs gain weight and if they’re having inappropriate fat metabolism, they can lay down fat in glumps. Literally, it’s a glump of fat, which is called in medical terms a “lipoma” or a benign fatty mass.

Animals can lay down these lipomas anywhere in their body. They can be under the skin, they can be in muscle tissue. They can be anywhere. The most common place where you’ll be able to feel them on your dog is under the skin. If they’re in the skin, they’re movable – you can pick them up and move them around. They’re soft and squishy. If they’re in a muscle, they’re very firm, and they can feel like a scary or cancerous tumor. But they’re probably fine.

How you know the difference between something scary and something not scary is when you find the mass on your dog, you head to the veterinarian – not an emergency visit. You ask your veterinarian to determine through a fine needle aspirate whether the mass is something to worry about or not to worry about at that time. If your veterinarian says, “We’ve done an aspirate, we’ve looked underneath a microscope, double-checked any suspicious cells with the pathologist, it’s benign, it’s fat, it’s a lipoma,” then there’s nothing to worry about. Then we make a note on the body chart of what size it is on the day you brought your dog in, and just watch that benign tumor for growth. If your dog’s lipoma begins to grow – if it’s on the move in terms of size – then depending on the location, it may be medically necessary to remove that lipoma before it’s big enough to really decrease your pet’s quality of life.

I can count with one hand the number of lipomas I’ve removed in my practice in the last five years. Those that I have removed, I’ve done so to dramatically improve the quality of an animal’s life. What I mean by that is this: some lipomas can remain the size of a golf ball their
whole life. There’s nothing to worry about. Just make sure they’re not growing or changing, and you’re not feeling that it’s any firmer in consistency. Leave them alone.

If you have a confirmed lipoma in the crook of your dogs’ groin or in their armpit – if their hip joint can’t rotate well on the inside – or if you begin the notice that the lipoma’s on the move and growing bigger, that’s something you may want to discuss with your veterinarian in terms of reducing range of motion, or your pet beginning to not use the limb normally in its gait. It’s something that you may want to consider removing when the tumor’s smaller rather than bigger. I will tell you that when tumors begin to disrupt an animal’s normal movement or quality of life in general, those tumors are usually pretty big. Your veterinarian’s going to make a really large incision, sometimes double the size of the lipoma, to be able to remove all of the fat.

Now, it’s important to know that when we do remove lipomas, we call it a debulking surgery. Debulking means we get the majority of it, sometimes 95 percent of the fat. However, with benign fatty tumors it’s very frustrating for veterinarians, because even though we can remove all the fat that we can see, there is always, always some fat cells that remain – fat cells that are in the fascia, that have slipped down into the musculature, that are on the under side of the skin. Those fat cells have a memory, and unfortunately, lipoms can reform. So we call it a debulking because we can’t promise you that the lipoma will not reform in that same location.

However, if your dog’s quality of life is impinged where the lipoma is really big, your dog’s no longer walking comfortably, or it’s causing ribcage rotation, or he’s compensating in a way that’s causing skeletal problems, oftentimes removing that tumor is going to dramatically improve your dog’s overall musculoskeletal health. It’s something you can consider.