



Splenic masses in dogs and cats

1. What a “splenic mass” means

A splenic mass simply means something abnormal growing in or on the spleen. It can be:

Category	Behaviour	Common in
Benign (non-cancerous)	May rupture/bleed but does not spread	Dogs (up to 50% of splenic masses are benign)
Malignant (cancer)	Invades & spreads	Dogs and cats
Reactive / enlargement	Not a tumour—secondary to inflammation/infection	Much more common in cats

2. Key difference between dogs and cats

Dogs

Splenic masses are very common and ~50% are benign (often hematoma or nodular hyperplasia). The “rule of 2/3”: ~2/3 malignant, and of those malignant, ~2/3 are hemangiosarcoma (HSA)—but that also means many are NOT HSA.

Cats

Splenic diffuse enlargement is more common than a discrete mass. True primary splenic tumours are rare. When neoplastic, mast cell tumour or lymphoma are most common. Cats often do very well after splenectomy for splenic MCT.

3. Signs owners notice

- Sudden weakness or collapse
- Pale gums
- Distended abdomen
- Intermittent lethargy
- Reduced appetite
- Vomiting (sometimes)
- In bleeding/rupture: sudden collapse + pale gums + rapid breathing
- Splenic tumours can bleed intermittently (“waxing and waning” episodes), which is why a dog may collapse and then “seem fine” again later.

4. Diagnosis & staging

Tool	Why It's done
Ultrasound	Identifies mass vs diffuse disease, checks liver & abdomen
Chest X-rays/CT	Checks for lung metastasis in malignant cases
Bloodwork	Looks for anaemia or clotting issue



Cytology (fine needle)**	Can be misleading for splenic masses — histopathology after splenectomy is the only way to know for sure
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Take-home: In dogs, you usually cannot tell benign vs cancer from **ultrasound alone**. Surgery is often diagnostic and therapeutic! Fine-needle aspirations can lead to profuse bleeding and is rarely diagnostic!

5. Surgical treatment: splenectomy

Splenectomy (removing the spleen) is the standard of care for most splenic masses, whether benign or malignant.

Species	Typical purposes of surgery
Dogs	Often diagnostic + life-saving, especially if bleeding
Cats	For mast cell tumour, splenectomy is strongly associated with longer survival; for lymphoma, additional therapy often recommended

6. Survival & prognosis

Dogs

Diagnosis after splenectomy	Typical outlook
Benign mass (hematoma / nodular hyperplasia)	Excellent – surgery usually curative
Hemangiosarcoma (HSA), spleen only, no spread	Surgery alone: ~1–3 months median With chemo: ~4–6 months, sometimes longer
Metastatic HSA (spread visible at surgery)	Weeks to a few months, palliative focus

Many owners are relieved to learn that a large proportion are benign, but malignant remains common!

Cats

Diagnosis	Typical outlook
Splenic mast cell tumour (MCT)	Good prognosis after splenectomy – many studies report survival >12–18 months, some >2 years
Splenic lymphoma	Depends on response to chemotherapy; splenectomy alone is not curative
Hemangiosarcoma in cats	Rare, more variable; often more aggressive than in dogs

7. Complications of splenectomy

Most dogs and cats recover **very well after splenectomy** with modern anaesthesia and monitoring. The most relevant risks:



Complication	Frequency
Arrhythmias (dogs)	~10–20% post-op
Bleeding requiring transfusion	~5–15%
Infection / wound issues	Low (<10%)
Anaesthetic risk increased if patient arrives in shock	Variable; stabilisation improves outcome

Cats generally have lower perioperative complication rates than dogs unless very systemically ill.

8. Role of chemotherapy / adjunct therapy

Species	When chemo is used
Dogs	Recommended for splenic HSA after splenectomy; improves survival compared with surgery alone
Cats	For splenic mast cell tumour, splenectomy alone often adequate; chemo considered for aggressive or disseminated disease. For lymphoma, chemo is standard.

9. Quality of life after splenectomy

Most pets return to **normal comfort and energy after recovery**. The spleen is not essential for day-to-day life; other organs compensate.

Activity restrictions: typically **10–14 days**. If the mass was benign: normal life expected. If malignant: time-focused but **usually good quality of life** with palliative or adjunctive treatment.

10. Key takeaways for owners

- Dogs: ~50% of splenic masses are benign
- Cats: splenic mast cell tumour often responds very well to splenectomy
- Surgery is frequently life-saving when bleeding is present
- Pathology after surgery is the only definitive diagnosis
- Prognosis ranges from curative (benign) to months (HSA)
- Chemotherapy improves outcome in canine HSA
- Most pets recover very smoothly after splenectomy

Selected English-language veterinary references

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3. Hammer AS et al. "Survival of Dogs with Splenic Masses: Benign vs Malignant." Vet Surg.
4. Henry CJ. "Feline Splenic Mast Cell Tumors: Survival and Management." J Feline Med Surg.
5. Sabattini S. "Feline Splenic Disease: Review of Neoplastic and Non-neoplastic Causes." JFMS.