Splenic Masses

Overview

Splenic masses are abnormal growths found inside or on the spleen, which can be either benign (non-cancerous) or malignant (cancerous). The spleen plays an important role in filtering blood, storing blood cells, and supporting the immune system. Masses in this organ are common in middle-aged to older dogs and can range from incidental findings to life-threatening conditions. It is essential to differentiate the type of mass to determine the appropriate treatment and prognosis.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis often involves a combination of imaging techniques, blood work, and sometimes surgical exploration:

- Ultrasound: Helps in visualizing the spleen and determining the presence, size, and characteristics of the mass.
- X-rays: Can reveal abdominal distension or signs of internal bleeding.
- CT Scan: Offers detailed imaging, especially useful for surgical planning and to understand if a malignant tumour has spread.
- Laboratory tests: Blood tests may show signs of internal bleeding or blood clotting disorders.
- Fine Needle Aspiration (FNA): A sample of the mass may be taken with the aid of ultrasound using a very small needle. The aspirated cells are placed into a slide and sent for analysis. This procedure typically requires sedation and is done cautiously to avoid the risk of causing bleeding from the mass.

Key facts

- Most common in older dogs: While any breed can be affected, certain breeds such as German Shepherds and Golden Retrievers are more predisposed.

- Types of splenic masses:
  - -Haemic (blood-related): Includes tumours like Hemangiosarcoma (HSA), which are cancerous and can lead to severe internal bleeding.
  - -Non-haemic (non-blood related): Includes benign masses such as nodular hyperplasia or hematomas, which may not cause severe health issues but can still rupture and bleed.

- Hemangiosarcoma (HSA) is the most common malignant tumour of the spleen and is highly metastatic, spreading quickly to other organs.

Appearance and Symptoms

- Appearance: Splenic masses may present as a single or multiple growths within the spleen and can vary significantly in size.
- Symptoms of internal bleeding (haemoabdomen):
  - -Weakness or collapse
  - -Pale gums
  - -Abdominal swelling or distension
  - -Lethargy
  - -Sudden onset of weakness

Staging

is a diagnostic process used to determine the extent or spread of cancer within the body, to guide treatment decisions, and to predict prognosis. The staging process typically involves a combination of diagnostic tests to evaluate both the primary tumour (spleen) and possible areas of metastasis.

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Treatment Options

The treatment depends on whether the mass is benign or malignant and the overall health of the dog.

- Surgery (Splenectomy):
  - -Removal of the spleen is the main treatment for splenic masses.
  - -Dogs can live without a spleen, but postoperative care is essential.
  - -Potential complications include bleeding, infection, and arrhythmias (abnormal heart rhythms).
- Chemotherapy:
  - -Recommended for malignant tumours like HSA after surgery.
- Supportive care:
  - -Blood transfusions may be necessary in cases -f severe internal bleeding.
  - -Pain management and monitoring for arrhythmias post-surgery.

Prognosis

The prognosis varies widely depending on the type of mass:

- Benign masses (e.g., hematomas, nodular hyperplasia): Good prognosis with splenectomy, and dogs often make a full recovery.
- Hemangiosarcoma (HSA): The prognosis is poor due to the aggressive nature of the tumour and high metastatic rate.

Key Takeaway

Splenic masses are a common health concern in older dogs. It is crucial to determine whether the mass is benign or malignant to provide appropriate treatment and care. Early detection and intervention can significantly improve outcomes, especially in cases where surgical removal is feasible.

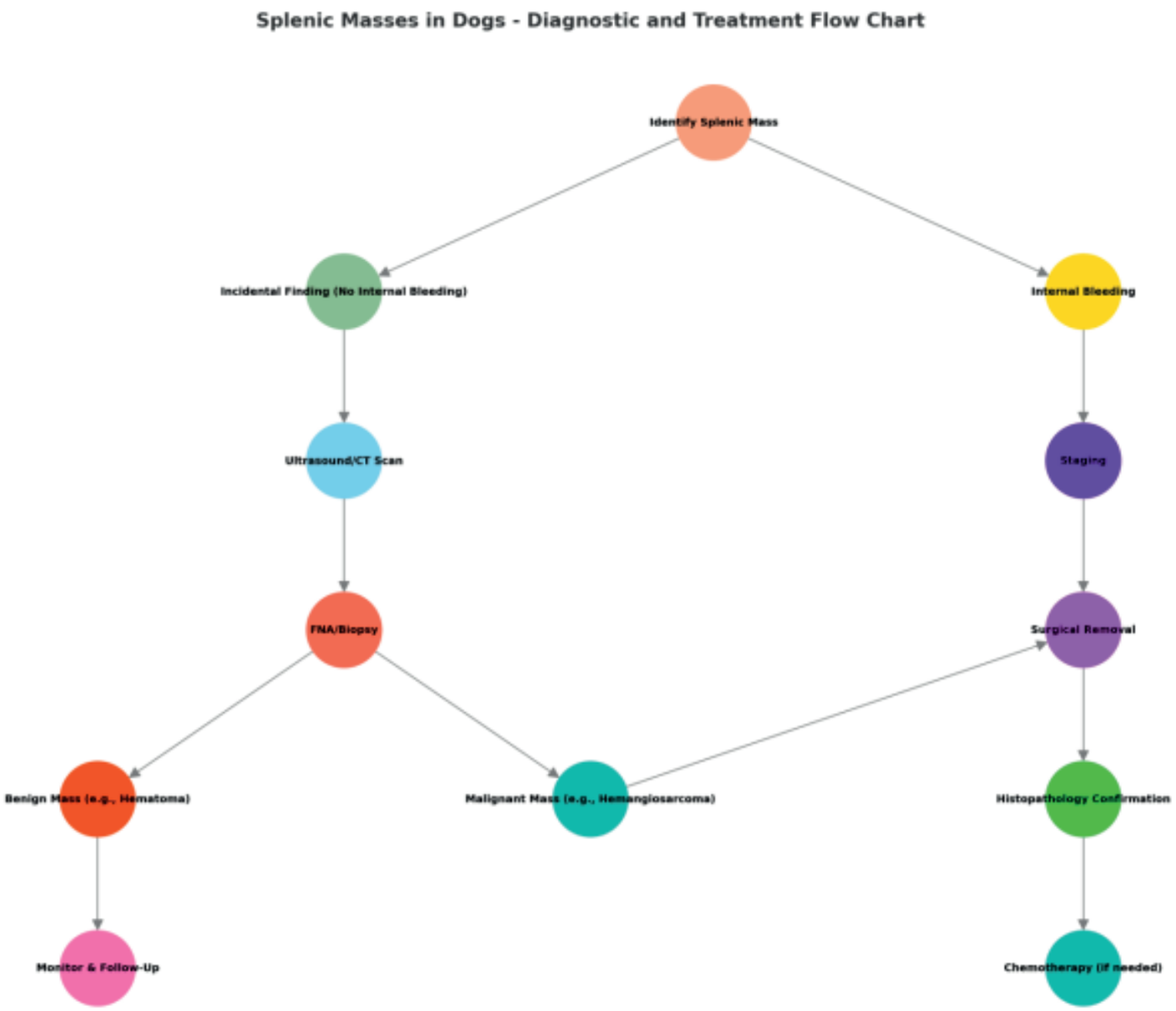
Aftercare and Monitoring

- Postoperative care: Includes monitoring for any signs of complications such as bleeding, infection, or arrhythmias. Regular follow-up visits are necessary.
- Monitoring for recurrence or metastasis: Dogs treated for malignant tumours like HSA should have routine imaging (e.g., chest X-rays, abdominal ultrasound) every 34- months to check for metastasis.
- Lifestyle adjustments: Reduced strenuous activity may be advised initially post-surgery to prevent complications.
- Medication: Pain relief and possibly antiarrhythmic drugs if postoperative arrhythmias are detected.

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