PennVet
Ryan Hospital

Acanthomatous Epulides in Dogs

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Epulides are firm masses involving the gingival tissue, and constitute the most common benign oral tumors in dogs. These tumors arise from the periodontal ligament, which holds the tooth in place with relation to the jawbone. Epulides occur less commonly in cats. They are seen in dogs of any age but occur more commonly in older dogs. Shetland Sheepdogs and Old English Sheepdogs are predisposed to these tumors, however epulides can occur in any breed of dog.

Typically, these tumors present as firm, irregular growths along the gumline in association with the teeth. Epulides may cause no outwardly visible signs, or alternatively, may cause excessive salivation, halitosis (bad breath), difficulty eating or dropping food from the mouth, weight loss, bleeding from the mouth, enlargement of the lymph nodes in the neck, or asymmetry of the upper or lower jaw.

There are three categories of epulides, with classification based upon the histologic type, clinical appearance, and tumor behavior:

- *Fibromatous epulis* (peripheral odontogenic fibroma)
- *Ossifying epulis* (peripheral odontogenic fibrome)
- *Acanthomatous epulis* (peripheral ameloblastoma or acanthomatous ameloblastoma)

Fibromatous and ossifying epulides are solitary, non-invasive tumors, though they can grow quite large. These tumors are benign, and complete surgical excision is curative. Acanthomatous epulides can behave more aggressively, with invasion into local tissues and destruction of underlying bone. They generally do not metastasize (spread), however because of their aggressive invasive and destructive biological behavior, surgical excision with a wide margin of normal tissue around the tumor is recommended to prevent recurrence. Depending upon the type of epulis, a portion of the jawbone may need to be removed along with the tumor. Advanced imaging such as dental x-rays, CT scan, or MRI may be recommended to determine the extent of the tumor and the feasibility of surgical excision. Recurrence of tumors is common with conservative excision. In addition, larger tumors have a significantly higher risk of recurrence.

Large tumors can also be treated with radiation therapy to control tumor growth (effective in a large percentage of cases). Further information regarding the specifics of radiation treatment, including duration of treatment, potential side effects, and prognosis, can be provided by your oncologist with respect to each individual patient. The role of chemotherapy is largely unknown in the treatment of epulides. Surgery and/or radiation therapy are the treatments of choice for these tumors. The prognosis is generally excellent with complete surgical removal.