

# Massive Study of Golden Retrievers May Shed Light on Causes of Cancer

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Could golden retrievers hold the key to more effective cancer prevention? Possibly, suggests a recent update of an ongoing longitudinal study of more than 3,000 of the flaxen canines that seeks to discover how diet, environment, sleep and more contribute to cancer risk over an animal's lifetime, [The Washington Post reports](#).

The golden retrievers are all pets participating in the \$32 million Golden Retriever Lifetime Study being conducted by Colorado State University and the Morris Animal Foundation. Through studying the animals, scientists hope to gain new insights into what causes cancer and other diseases common to goldens and other dog breeds as well as possibly humans.

For the study, researchers are compiling comprehensive data on every aspect of the dogs' lives, from their biology, to what they eat, to whether their lawns are treated with pesticides, to their exercise habits and whether their teeth get brushed on a regular basis. Researchers say the longitudinal study is the first and largest of its kind to examine cancer risk in pets and has been running since 2012. (Longitudinal studies gather information in real time over long periods.)

Scientists chose to study golden retrievers because they are known to have a slightly higher prevalence of cancer than other breeds. Goldens are also the third most popular breed in the United States, which made it easier to find a large study cohort. Using only one breed also helps the scientists exclude from their findings potential complicating variations.

So far, researchers say the study has yielded no major cancer revelations, although its oldest participants are just 7 years old and not generally yet afflicted by cancer or other illnesses. However, over time, researchers say they expect to uncover fascinating insights about both dog and human cancer causes — especially considering that people and dogs spend so much of their lives together and seem to develop cancer in a similar way. What's more, many of the cancer treatments prescribed to goldens are the same as those prescribed to humans, and both species respond similarly to such treatments.

Currently, cancer is the leading cause of death among dogs over age 2 and is diagnosed in about half of all dogs older than 10. Just as with humans, the life expectancy of dogs is increasing, which appears to be leading to an increase in cancer rates. Through ongoing research of our furry friends, researchers believe we may one day be able to reverse that trend — leading to happier,

healthier, longer lives for both species.

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