

Dry eye in dogs

Overview

Dry eye is a condition that stops your dog producing tears and causes dry, painful eyes.

There are a few different causes of dry eye. The most common is a fault in the immune system that causes the body to attack and destroy the tear glands. The outlook for a dog with dry eye tends to be good if the condition is noticed early and treatment is continued for life.

Dry eye is more common in certain pedigree dogs.

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any problems with your dog's eye(s) – they are too important to leave to chance.

What is dry eye?



THIS DOG HAS DRY EYE, NOTE THE STICKY DISCHARGE AND LACK OF SHINE IN HIS EYES

Dry eye is a very painful condition that prevents your dog producing tears. Some dogs with dry eye may be able to produce

a small amount of tears but others won't be able to produce any at all. Left untreated, dry eye gets worse over time.

Most cases of dry eye are due to a fault in your dog's immune system. This fault causes the body to attack and destroy their own tear glands. More rarely, dry eye can develop due to faulty nerves leading to the tear glands (neurogenic dry eye), certain hormonal problems (e.g. hypothyroidism) or even as a side effects of certain medications.

Symptoms

Symptoms of dry eye include:

- Sticky eye
- Dried discharge around the eye
- Red eye
- Cloudy eyes
- A lack of shine in the eyes
- Eye infections (that comes back quickly after treatment)
- Rubbing the face and / or eyes
- Closing the eyes or blinking more than usual
- Eye ulcers

When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with your vet if you notice any of the symptoms above, or suspect your dog has dry eye.

You know your dog best. If you are concerned it's always best to contact your vet – eyes are too important to leave to chance.

Breeds prone to dry eye

Any dog can develop dry eye but certain pedigree dogs are more likely to develop the condition, including:

- Cavalier King Charles Spaniel
- Pug
- West Highland White Terrier
- American Cocker Spaniel
- Shih Tzu

Treatment

Treatment for dry eye needs to be lifelong and may include:

Medication to help tear production

- Drops or ointment can be used to help tear production.
- They are usually given twice daily and can take several weeks to take full effect.
- They work best if the condition is noticed and treated early, treatment unlikely to work if the entire tear gland has been destroyed before treatment starts.
- Cyclosporin ('Optimmune') eye ointment is the most commonly used medication for controlling dry eye. It stops the immune system destroying the tear glands.
- If one medication doesn't work for your dog, speak to your vet about other treatment options (tacrolimus for example).

False tears

- False tears replace the tears that your dog can't produce for itself.
- They're generally given several times a day and give very good relief to dry eye(s).

- They generally need to be used at the same time as a medication to help tear production (such as cyclosporin).
- Once your dog has been diagnosed with dry eye, false tears are likely to be necessary for the rest of their life.

Antibiotic eye drops

- Antibiotic eye drops aren't needed to treat dry eye itself but might be needed from time to time if your dog develops an infection because of dry eye.
- If your vet gives your dog antibiotic eye drops it's very important to follow the instructions and complete the course. This will make sure the infection is fully treated and doesn't return.

Take a look at our video: 'HOW TO: Apply eye drops for your dog' www.pdsa.org.uk/dryeye

Eye wiping

- Keeping your dog's eyes clean is an important part of managing dry eye.
- A dog with dry eye is likely to have dried discharge around their eyes. This is irritating and provides a perfect place for bacteria to grow and infections to start.
- Clean the fur around your dog's eyes using cotton wool pads soaked in warm water (at least daily). Make sure to wet the discharge and give it a chance to loosen before trying to remove it.

Surgery

- If your dog's dry eye doesn't get better with eye drops your vet may suggest visiting a specialist eye hospital for treatment.
- An operation called 'parotid duct transposition' may be offered. The aim of this surgery is to redirect a tube that carries saliva into the eye. The saliva keeps the surface of the eye moist.

- This surgery can be very effective, but in some dogs saliva can be quite irritating to the surface of the eye – for this reason surgery is usually left as a last resort.
- If your vet doesn't get to see your dog before a lot of damage has happened or, if the treatments don't work, it is sometimes necessary to remove a badly damaged eye to relieve pain and suffering for your dog.

Outlook

Dry eye is a condition that gets worse over time if it's not treated. If dry eye is noticed quickly and treatment is started straight away your dog will have a much better chance of keeping their bright healthy eyes.

Each dog will respond differently to the medication given. The outlook depends heavily on your dog's response to treatment. Always follow your vets' instructions carefully and be sure to give your dog all the medication they need at the correct times. Use our medication planner to help remind you when your dog's medications need to be given.

Prevention

There is nothing you can do to prevent your dog developing dry eye. However, if you are considering getting a pedigree dog make sure you research the breed so you are aware of any potential health problems (including dry eye).

Cost

Dry eye is a condition that needs lifelong treatment, this can become very expensive. Consider insuring your dog as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. This will ensure you have all the support you need to care for them.

It's also very important to speak openly to your vet about your finances, the cost of treatment, as well as what you think is right for your dog. There is often several treatment options so if one doesn't work for you and your pet then the vet may be able to offer another.

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