

Eye ulcers (corneal ulcers) in dogs

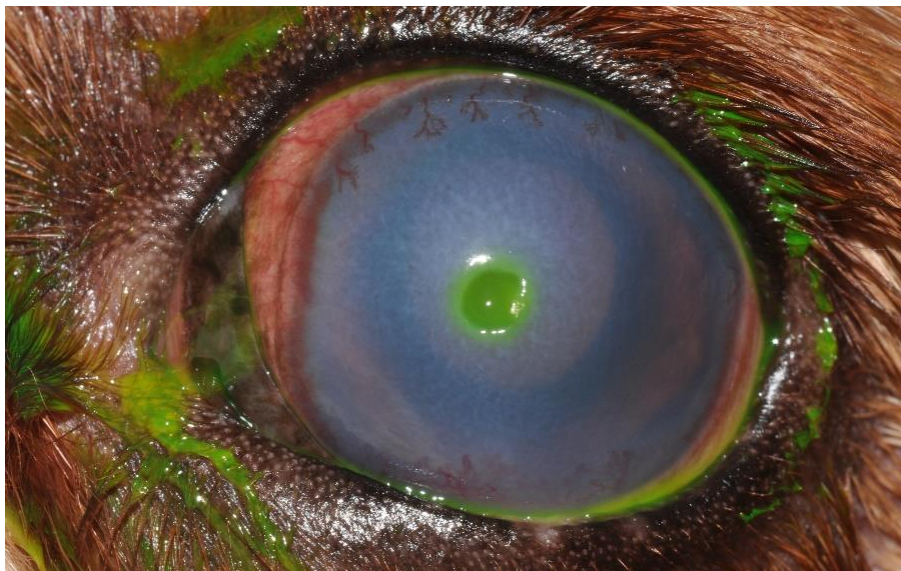
Overview

An eye ulcer is a wound on the front of the eye; they are very painful and can develop for many different reasons.

Ulcers often appear suddenly and get rapidly worse. However, eyes heal quickly so with vet treatment an ulcer is likely to heal within a few days (unless complications develop).

Leaving an ulcer without veterinary treatment can result in loss of an eye.

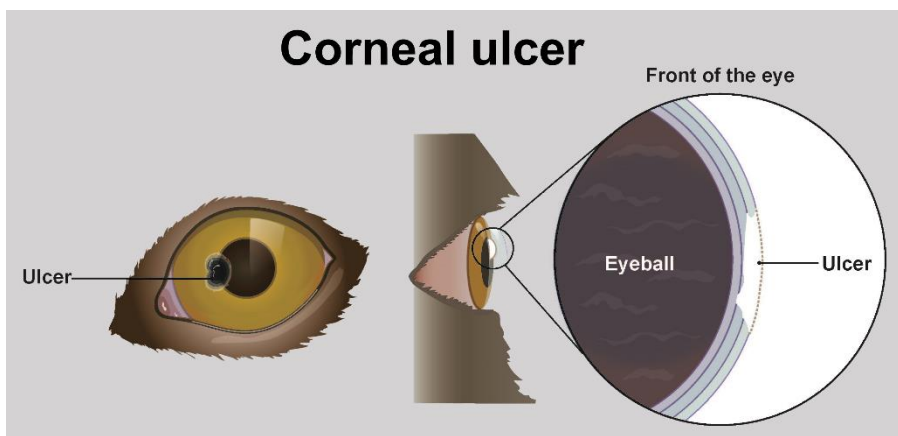
Book an appointment with your vet ASAP if you notice anything wrong with your dog's eyes – they are too important to leave to chance.



*A deep ulcer in a dog's eye, highlighted by a green dye.
Photograph with thanks from [Eye Veterinary Clinic](#).*

Corneal ulcers explained

Eye ulcers (also called 'corneal ulcers') are damage to the surface of the eye (see picture). Ulcers vary from being very shallow (a minor graze or scratch) to much deeper and more serious.



The front of the eye is very thin, deep ulcers can cause the eye to burst. A burst eye may need removal or referral to a specialist eye clinic. If caught early enough, surgery to repair a burst eye is occasionally possible.

Common causes include injuries, dry eye, infections, and entropion (in-turning eyelids).

Indolent ulcers and melting ulcers are two, very serious types of eye ulcer that need special, intensive treatment. Read our articles on these particular types of ulcer.

Eye ulcers can be very painful and can quickly get worse if left untreated.

Symptoms

Symptoms of an eye ulcer include:

- Red, inflamed, blood shot eye
- An obvious hole or crater on the surface of their eye
- Closed eye or squinting
- Blinking more than usual
- Weepy eye
- Cloudy eye
- Scratching and rubbing at the face and eye
- Avoiding bright lights

When to contact your vet

Book an appointment with your vet if your dog is showing any of the symptoms above or you suspect they may have an ulcer on their eye.

You know your dog best. If they don't have the symptoms listed above but you are still concerned it's always best to contact your vet.

Causes

So how did your dog get a corneal ulcer? Possible causes include:

Dry eye

- Dry eye (lack of tears) causes eyes to become irritated and painful, and is a common cause of ulcers in dogs. Your vet may test for dry eye if your dog regularly suffers from ulcers.

Injury

- Injuries such as stick injuries and cat scratches are a common cause of eye ulcers.

Something in the eye

- Something stuck in the eye such as a grass seed or grit (usually behind the third eyelid) can cause an ulcer.

Eyelid problems

- Eyelid problems such as entropion (turning in of the eyelids) causes rubbing, pain and often ulcers.

Eyelash problems

- Eyelashes growing in the wrong place or at a strange angle can cause irritation and eye ulcers.

Eye infections

- Both bacterial (bacterial conjunctivitis) and viral eye infections can cause eye ulcers.

Breeds at high risk

Short nosed dogs are at a much higher risk of eye ulcers because their eyes bulge forward and are very exposed. Dogs that suffer from eye conditions such as dry eye are also at a higher risk of an ulcer. Breeds at risk include:

- Pug
- Shih Tzu
- Bulldog
- Boxer
- West Highland Terrier
- Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

Treatment

Treatment depends upon how severe your dog's ulcer is and may include:

A buster collar

- A buster collar will prevent your dog from rubbing or scratching at their eye whilst it heals. This is vitally important for the treatment of an ulcer.

Eye drops

- Antibiotic eye drops or ointments may be given to prevent infections developing while the ulcer heals. Antibiotic drops usually need to be given 2 – 4 times a day.
- Lubricating drops (similar to false tears) may be used to sooth the front of the eye and keep it moist while it heals.
- XXAtropine eye drops may be given if your dog has developed a tiny pupil (a common problem in painful eyes).

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

Anti-inflammatory pain relief

- Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are excellent at reducing pain and swelling.

Antibiotic tablets

- Antibiotics tablets aren't always necessary but may be prescribed if your vet is particularly worried about your dog's eye developing an infection.

Surgery

- Your dog may require surgery if their eye has been badly damaged or isn't healing.
- Your vet may have to refer your dog to a specialist eye hospital.

Non-healing ulcers

If your dog has an ulcer that isn't healing as quickly as expected, your vet may decide to take further action. This may include:

- Swabbing the front of the eye to check for infection.
- Changing your dog's eye drops.
- Performing a minor procedure called 'debridement' or a grid keratotomy. Both are simple procedures that help heal the ulcer.

Prevention

There isn't much you can do to prevent eye ulcers but some sensible precautions include:

- Protecting short nosed dogs from running into hedges, sharp table corners etc.
- Cat scratches are a common cause of eye ulcers in dogs – if your two furry friends don't see 'eye-to-eye', keep them separate!
- Visit the vet ASAP if you notice any problems with your dog's eye

Cost

Treatment for eye problems such as ulcers can become very expensive. Consider insuring your dog as soon as you get them, before any signs of illness start. Then 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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