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Cataracts



What is a cataract?

A cataract is any abnormal cloudiness or opacity within the lens of the eye. The lens is normally clear and acts to focus light onto the retina to create a sharp image. When a cataract forms, it blocks light from reaching the retina, leading to impaired vision or even total blindness.

What are the common signs of a cataract?

- **Cloudy Appearance:** The pupil may change from black to a milky white, grey, or bluish-grey haze.
- **Behavioural Changes:** Bumping into furniture, hesitation in low light, or difficulty finding toys/treats.
- **Loss of "Eye Shine":** You may notice the eye no longer reflects light in night-time photographs.
- **Secondary Signs:** Redness, squinting, or rubbing the face can indicate painful inflammation (uveitis) or increased pressure (glaucoma) associated with the cataract.

What Causes Cataracts?

- **Genetics:** The most common cause in dogs; many breeds e.g. Labrador Retrievers, are predisposed to inherited cataracts.
- **Diabetes:** High blood sugar causes the lens to absorb water and swell, often leading to rapid cataract formation.
- **Ageing:** While common in older pets, cataracts can actually occur at any age.
- **Other Factors:** Eye injuries (trauma), internal inflammation (uveitis), or nutritional deficiencies in young puppies/kittens.

What are the treatment options for cataracts?

There are currently no clinically proven eye drops or medications that can "dissolve" or reverse a cataract. **Surgery is the only effective treatment** to restore vision.

- **Phacoemulsification:** This is the same advanced technique used in human surgery. A tiny ultrasound probe is introduced in to the eye under general anaesthetic which breaks up the cloudy lens so it can be removed. In most cases, an artificial intraocular lens (IOL) is then placed inside the eye to allow the pet to focus clearly again. When performed by experienced surgeons like View Referrals, surgery has a high success rate of approximately **85% to 90%**.

What Happens if a cataract is left untreated?

While some pets adapt well to gradual vision loss, untreated cataracts can lead to serious complications:

- **Lens-Induced Uveitis:** Inflammation caused by the cataract "leaking" proteins into the eye.
- **Glaucoma:** A painful increase in eye pressure that can cause irreversible damage to the optic nerve.
- **Lens Luxation:** The cataractous lens can become unstable and shift out of its normal position.

If surgery is not opted for, then we may recommend long-term use of topical eye drops to help to minimise the risk of the complications detailed above from developing, with the aim of keeping your pet comfortable.

Prompt evaluation by a veterinary ophthalmologist is the best way to preserve your pet's vision and comfort. If you are concerned that your pet may have cataracts or would like to discuss the topic further, then please do not hesitate to get in touch with our team.