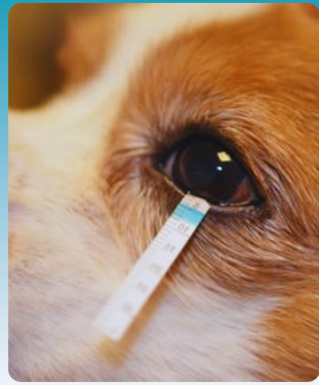




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Dry eye syndrome



What is dry eye syndrome?

Dry eye syndrome, also known as keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS) is a condition in which the eye does not produce enough tears, or the tears produced are not of good enough quality to keep the eye surface healthy. It is seen most commonly in dogs, but cats can also be affected. Dry eye can be uncomfortable and, if left untreated, may lead to corneal ulceration, scarring, pigmentation, recurrent infection and reduced vision.

Why are tears important and where do they come from?

Tears do much more than keep the eye moist. They lubricate the cornea, provide oxygen and nutrients to cornea, wash away dust and debris, and help protect against infection. Tears are produced by various glands that surround the eye, with each gland producing a different part of the tear itself.

What causes dry eye?

In dogs, the most common cause is immune-mediated inflammation, where the body's immune system damages the tear-producing glands. This is more common in certain breeds e.g. West Highland White Terriers, Bulldogs, Shih Tzus, but any breed of dog or cat can be affected. Other possible causes include congenital problems, previous removal or damage to the third-eyelid gland, certain medications, infections, endocrine disease such as diabetes or hypothyroidism, trauma, and loss of nerve supply to the tear glands. In cats, dry eye is less common, but chronic feline herpesvirus infection and other causes of ocular surface inflammation may contribute.

What signs might I notice at home?

Signs of dry eye can vary from mild irritation of the eye to severe discomfort. The hallmark is usually a thick, sticky recurrent ocular discharge, but you may also notice redness, squinting, frequent blinking, rubbing at the face, a dull or cloudy appearance to the eye. In longer-standing cases, small blood vessels or dark pigment may develop on the cornea which can impede sight.

How is dry eye diagnosed?

A Schirmer tear test is performed to measure your pet's ability to produce tears by placing a small paper strip just inside the eyelid for one minute and evaluating the response. We may also use fluorescein dye to check for corneal ulcers and assess the tear film quality.

How is dry eye treated?

Most pets are managed successfully with eye drops or ointments. Treatment is tailored to the individual patient and may include tear-stimulating medication, lubricants or artificial tears, anti-inflammatory medication, and antibiotics if there is secondary infection. Tear-stimulating medicines are often needed long term and may take several weeks to achieve their full effect. It is very important not to stop medication unless advised, even if the eye looks better.

Why not use artificial tears alone?

Lubricants can be very helpful for comfort and protection, especially while other medicines are starting to work. However, they do not fully replace all the functions of natural tears, and they do not treat the underlying immune-mediated damage that is common in dogs. For many pets, the main aim is to encourage natural tear production as well as keeping the eye surface comfortable.

What if the eye does not respond to medicine?

If medical treatment is not effective, or if tear production is extremely low, surgery may be discussed. One option in selected cases is parotid duct transposition, in which a small salivary duct is redirected so that saliva helps moisten the eye surface. This is performed under general anaesthetic and is reserved for carefully selected patients because saliva is not identical to tears and ongoing care may still be required.

What are the possible complications of parotid duct transposition?

Because saliva has a different composition from tears, mineral deposits or small crystals can form on the eye surface. Some pets have increased wetting around the eye, especially around meal times, and most still need some ongoing eye medication.

How can I help at home?

- Give all medication exactly as prescribed and try to space different eye medications by at least 10 minutes unless we advise otherwise.

- Gently wipe away discharge with clean damp cotton wool before applying drops or ointment.
- Do not use leftover eye medication or human eye drops unless your veterinary surgeon has specifically advised this.
- Attend recommended recheck appointments so we can measure tear production and adjust treatment if needed. Dry eye syndrome is a dynamic condition that can change during life.
- Contact your vet urgently if the eye becomes suddenly more painful, cloudy, blue, red, or if your pet starts holding the eye closed.

What is the outlook?

With early diagnosis, appropriate treatment and regular monitoring, many pets with dry eye remain comfortable and retain good vision. However, dry eye is often a lifelong condition. Regular follow-up allows us to check that the treatment is still working, detect corneal ulcers or scarring early, and keep your pet's eyes as comfortable and healthy as possible.