

Cataracts in Dogs

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Overview/Risk

We tend to think of **cataracts** as a normal byproduct of aging, whether we are talking about our grandmother or our four-legged friend. Age isn't the only reason cataracts develop; there are many medical reasons that our pets may develop cataracts. Contact your veterinarian immediately if you see any change in the appearance of your dog's eyes, or you think your dog's vision either has deteriorated or been compromised.

Cataracts result from a disease process affecting the lens of the eye, causing the lens to lose its transparency and thus impairing vision; in some cases, cataracts can even cause blindness. The lens of the eye becomes thick and opaque, resulting in a whitish/ gray area in the center of the eye. Cataracts may progress slowly or rapidly, depending on their underlying cause.

There are a number of reasons your dog may develop cataracts. The most common cause is genetics. [Diabetic dogs](#) are especially susceptible to developing cataracts. Other causes include diseases, nutritional disorders from puppyhood, eye injury, or infection. Most cataracts develop with age, but shouldn't be confused with nuclear sclerosis, a normal change of the lens in pets over 7 years of age, which causes the lens to appear somewhat whiter or grayer but does not seem to impair the dog's vision.

Symptoms

What should you expect if your pet develops cataracts? The most common signs are:

- A bluish, gray, or white layer in the eye
- A sudden reluctance to climb stairs or jump on furniture
- Clumsiness
- Eye irritation/redness, discharge or blinking
- Rubbing or scratching of the eyes

Testing/Treatment

In order to diagnose your dog's eye condition, your veterinarian will perform a complete history, a physical examination, including an eye examination and certain tests to evaluate the eyes. Additionally, they may recommend the following, depending on your dog's

specific needs.

A separate visit to a veterinary ophthalmologist who specializes in eye diseases

Blood tests to assess for an underlying cause, which may include:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate kidney, liver and pancreatic disease and function as well as sugar levels
- A complete blood count to rule out infection, inflammation, and anemia, as well as other conditions
- Specialty tests, such as cultures and polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing and/or tests to evaluate the function of the retina

The treatment of your dog's cataracts will depend on the underlying cause, his stage of development, and his overall health.

Treatment may include:

- Treating the underlying cause, if known
- Eye drops that may help to prevent inflammation and other secondary problems
- Surgical removal of the cataract, generally by a veterinary ophthalmologist, if your pet is otherwise healthy and is a candidate for surgery

Prevention

Routine eye exams as part of your dog's yearly physical will help in monitoring her eye health. If there is an underlying cause, treating the underlying disease may improve your pet's prognosis.

Finally, dogs with progressive cataracts, that are not candidates for surgery, can learn, with help from their owners, to cope and compensate for the loss of vision with their other keen senses, such as smell. Your veterinarian will help you by providing sound advice about caring for your friend, should she develop cataracts.

If you have any questions or concerns, you should always visit or call your veterinarian - they are your best resource to ensure the health and well-being of

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your pets.