

Cataracts in cats

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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. However, cats develop cataracts less commonly than dogs do—and age is not generally the key factor. Therefore, it is very important to contact your veterinarian immediately if you notice a change in the appearance of your cat's eyes, or you think her vision has been impacted in any way.

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 the underlying cause.

Most commonly, feline cataracts develop secondarily to inflammation as a result of eye trauma, viral infection, or other infections. Another common cause is poor nutrition as a kitten. Cataracts should not be confused with nuclear sclerosis, a normal change of the lens in pets over 7 years of age, which causes the lens to appear white but does not visually impair vision.

Symptoms

What should you expect if your pet develops cataracts?

The most common signs are:

- A bluish, gray, or white layer on the eye
- A sudden reluctance to climb stairs or jump on furniture
- Clumsiness

Testing/Treatment

In order to diagnose your cat's eye condition, your veterinarian will perform a complete history, a physical examination, and an eye examination. Additionally, they may recommend the following, depending on your cat's specific needs.

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

Blood tests to determine the underlying cause, which may include:

- Chemistry tests to evaluate for kidney, liver and pancreatic disease 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
- An ultrasound of the eye, if the cataract is too thick to allow for thorough examination of the eye

The treatment of your pet's cataracts will depend upon 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, if your cat is otherwise healthy and is a candidate for surgery

Prevention

Routine eye examinations as part of your cat's yearly physical will help in monitoring her eye health. It is also important to keep your friend up-to-date on lifestyle-appropriate vaccines, to help prevent viral infections that may predispose her to cataracts. Remember: a leading cause of cataracts in cats is injury, which includes trauma and fighting with other cats. Thus, preventing your cat from exposure to other cats reduces the risk! If you notice anything abnormal about your pet's eyes or vision, contact your veterinarian immediately.

Finally, with help from their owners, cats with cataracts can adjust to decreased vision. Your veterinarian will help you by providing sound advice about caring for your friend, should he 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 your pets.

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