



Animal Eye Clinic

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CHERRY EYE

What is cherry eye?

Cherry eye is a condition that occurs when the tear-producing gland of the third eyelid has prolapsed. The third eyelid (nictitating membrane) is a thin piece of tissue that is located in the inner corner of the eye, under the lower eyelid, in most domestic species. A gland located on the inner surface of this tissue produces 30-60% of the aqueous tear component and is held behind the nictitating membrane by a ligament. A prolapse of this gland may occur in one or both eyes.

What causes cherry eye?

A prolapsed gland (a.k.a. cherry eye) is thought to be the result of a weakness in the ligament. It is most commonly seen in young dogs, six weeks to two years of age. Certain breeds are predisposed to this condition, including:

American Cocker Spaniel
Beagle
Bloodhound
English Bulldog
Lhasa Apso

Miniature Poodle
Newfoundland
Shar Pei
Shih Tzu

The gland may also prolapse secondary to inflammation of the nictitating membrane. In some cases the gland may prolapse due to an unknown cause.

What will I see if my dog has cherry eye?

Cherry eye is usually very easy to detect. Signs include:

- A pink or red oval mass protruding from the inside corner of the eye(s)
- A watery or thick discharge from the affected eye(s)
- Redness of the conjunctiva
- Discomfort seen in the occasional rubbing of the eye

It is important to know that there is a second lacrimal (tear-producing) gland located above the eye which produces the rest of the tears. However, the longer that the third eyelid gland is in an abnormal position, the greater the risk that it may be permanently damaged. This may lead to other conditions such as keratoconjunctivitis sicca (KCS or dry eye).

How is cherry eye treated?

Medical treatment with topical corticosteroids to reduce inflammation can be attempted, but this treatment rarely results in the gland returning to its original position.

The recommended treatment is a surgical procedure to tack the gland back into place using a suture. This returns the gland to its hidden position and allows it to remain functional. When performed by an experienced veterinary ophthalmologist, the success rate of this procedure is 90%. In the past, removal of the entire gland was recommended. However, this increases the risk of developing KCS.

It is important to note that if only one gland has prolapsed, the other eye should be monitored closely for prolapse. In some cases the other gland may be sutured as well to prevent a future prolapse. It is also important to be aware that in 10% of cases, the gland may prolapse again and require further surgery to tuck it back into position.

What happens on the day of surgery?

After being given pain medication, your pet will be put under general anesthesia. The technician will prep the eye with an antibacterial agent. The ophthalmologist will tuck the gland back into place under the third eyelid, and suture it into place. The other gland may also be sutured as a prophylactic measure against further prolapse. Your pet will recover in the wards and should be ready to return home the same day.

What will I need to do at home?

After surgery your pet's third eyelid may look red and swollen for a few days. You may also notice some blood tinged discharge coming from the eye for the first few days following surgery. These are both normal postoperative conditions that can be managed as follows:

- Keep the pet's Elizabethan collar on at all times to prevent further irritation of the surgery site by rubbing.
- Wipe away all discharge from the eye using a clean, moist paper towel.
- Keep your pet quiet for a few days, limiting play and excitement.
- Apply all medication according to the ophthalmologist's directions.
- Call us if you have any questions or concerns.

Your pet will require at least one recheck appointment with us in order to monitor the healing process. This will be one week after the surgery.

It is important to know that despite the surgery, KCS may develop later in life if the gland has been damaged. Therapy to manage KCS can be prescribed if this occurs.