



# Animal Eye Clinic

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## **CONJUNCTIVITIS**

### **What is conjunctivitis?**

Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of the conjunctiva. The conjunctiva is the pink mucous membrane tissue which covers the sclera and lines the upper and lower eyelids. Normally, it is moist and pink, with tiny blood vessels. It acts as a protective barrier for the eye by trapping debris and helping to prevent the invasion of infectious agents such as bacteria and viruses. There is normal flora (bacteria) that live on the conjunctiva and rarely cause problems.

Conjunctivitis is a common problem seen in many species. It may be present alone or occur secondary to another disease process.

### **What causes conjunctivitis?**

There are many causes of conjunctivitis. The more commonly seen causes include:

- Viral infection (mostly cats)
- Bacterial infection (mostly dogs)
- Parasites
- Corneal disease
- Tear disorders affecting the lacrimal glands and/or tear production
- Eyelid infections and/or abnormalities
- Foreign bodies
- Trauma
- Environmental allergies
- Idiopathic – where there is no determined cause
- Systemic illness

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and there are many other causes of conjunctivitis.

### **What will I see if my pet has conjunctivitis?**

Common symptoms of conjunctivitis include:

- Redness of eyes
- Discharge from the eyes – can be watery, thick, mucous-like, green, etc.
- Chemosis - swelling of the conjunctiva
- Discomfort as evidenced by squinting, excessive blinking, sensitivity to light
- Rubbing or pawing at eyes

### **How is conjunctivitis treated?**

The treatment for conjunctivitis will depend on the cause. Diagnosis of the cause is usually based on physical findings and history. Additional tests may be required to determine the exact cause. These tests include: swabs for bacterial culture, conjunctival scrapings or biopsies for cytology or histopathology, and blood tests.

Treatment of conjunctivitis usually focuses on alleviating the symptoms, especially when an exact cause cannot be determined. In most cases treatment will consist of medical intervention in the form of antibiotic drops or ointment, anti-inflammatory drops, and artificial tears for lubrication. In some cases surgical intervention may be required, often minor procedures done under local anesthetic. Surgical procedures will be followed by a course of medications to prevent further problems.

Some types of conjunctivitis, such as bacterial conjunctivitis, one or two courses of treatment may be enough to treat and control the disease. The risk of recurrence in these cases is fairly low. There are also cases where conjunctivitis may flare up repeatedly, as in follicular conjunctivitis. In these cases, the flare ups will need to be treated each time they occur. Some animals will be placed on long term treatments to prevent flare ups. In addition, some types of conjunctivitis such as KCS will require lifelong medical therapy with ointments and drops in order to be controlled.