



# Animal Eye Clinic

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## **IRIS MELANOMA - CANINE**

### **What is iris melanoma?**

An iris melanoma is a pigmented tumour located within the iris, the coloured portion inside the eye. These tumours commonly originate from cells within the eye, but may occur as the result of metastasis from other areas of the body. These tumours cause a change (darkening) in the pigment of the iris over time, possibly taking months or years to develop.

In the dog, iris melanomas most commonly display benign behaviour, meaning they do not usually spread to other sites in the body. There are rare cases of malignant behaviour and metastasis (spread) in some very aggressive tumours. Over time the benign tumour may become malignant. These tumours tend to be malignant more often in cats than dogs. The tumour may cause pain, blindness due to uveitis, bleeding within the eye, glaucoma and damage to nearby structures.

### **What to watch for:**

- Colour change in iris
- Obvious mass in iris
- Change in shape of pupil
- Bleeding within the eye
- Cloudiness of the cornea
- Squinting, increased tearing, sensitivity to light
- Swelling or change in shape of eye
- Red conjunctiva

A complete ophthalmic exam is done to diagnose the tumour. Other tests that may be necessary if the tumour is confirmed on the exam may include ocular ultrasound, aspirates of the intraocular fluid or mass, CBC, bone marrow aspirate, chest x-rays, abdominal x-rays and ultrasound, CT, or MRI.

### **What are the treatment options?**

There are two options. The first is laser treatment to destroy the tumour cells. This is only an option for small masses that do not invade the iridocorneal angle. Laser treatment is non-invasive and is aimed at destroying as many tumour cells as possible. The tumour must be monitored following laser treatment to evaluate for recurrence. The second treatment is enucleation (removal of the eye), which is usually performed when the eye becomes painful secondary to inflammation or glaucoma.

## **Feline Iris Melanoma**

Iris melanomas are tumours on the iris (the coloured portion of the eye). These tumours most commonly originate from cells within the eye, or less frequently, may spread to the eye from other body sites. The tumour causes a change in the pigment of the iris over several months to years. In the cat, diffuse iris melanomas are most often malignant and can spread to the liver and lungs. Based on several studies, the overall risk that the cat will die of its melanoma is about 20%. These tumours are more likely to metastasize if they are large or they invade the sclera (white part of the eye). Survival of cats may be reduced if the tumour is large and invasive, or if glaucoma is present. Glaucoma eventually occurs in all cases but it may take 5-7 years for the tumour to progress to that stage. The tumour may cause pain, blindness due to uveitis, bleeding within the eye, glaucoma and damage to nearby structures.

### **What to watch for:**

- Colour change in iris
- Obvious mass in iris
- Change in shape of pupil
- Bleeding within the eye
- Cloudiness of the cornea
- Squinting, increased tearing, sensitivity to light
- Swelling or change in shape of eye
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A complete ophthalmic exam is done to diagnose the tumour. Other tests that may be necessary if the tumour is confirmed on the exam may include ocular ultrasound, aspirates of the intraocular fluid or mass, CBC, bone marrow aspirate, chest x-rays, abdominal x-rays and ultrasound, CT, or MRI.

### **What are the treatment options?**

Enucleation is indicated for large tumours or those causing glaucoma. For smaller tumours, it is generally recommended to watch the tumour for a sudden change in growth habit. Enucleation is often necessary, but the cat should retain vision as long as possible.