

Almost everyone has known someone who has been affected by an eye problem. From corneal ulcers, cataracts, and vision loss, we humans have a lot of problems with our eyes! What most pet owners don't realize is that many of these same eye issues can affect our pets. Animals can get cataracts, develop corneal ulcers, and experience vision loss. Animals are also affected by numerous veterinary-specific ophthalmic issues, such as cherry eye. Thankfully, eye care technology for our pets has made great strides in recent history, and animals now have many of the same treatment options as we humans do when it comes to their ophthalmic problems.

Cataracts are one of the most common problems in both human and veterinary ophthalmology. Cataracts are often described as "cloudiness" or opacity of the lenses of one or both eyes. This opacity adversely affects the eye's ability to focus light onto the retina, which is the light perceiving tissue of the eye that relays this signal to the brain. Cataracts can have varying levels of severity, ranging from pinpoint and relatively innocuous areas of cloudiness, to large, pervasive cataracts that can affect the entire lens and completely compromise vision in one or both eyes.

Cataracts can be caused by many factors but is most commonly seen as our pets age. However, young animals can also develop cataracts, especially if other animals in their family tree have been

similarly diagnosed. Genetics appear to play a significant role in the development of this condition, and therefore certain breeds can have a predisposition to cataracts. In addition to age and heritability, inflammation in the eye and injury can also contribute to the development of cataracts in animals. Diabetes, in particular, is known to have a strong correlation with cataract formation. When diabetic dogs have cataracts, the opacity can



develop rapidly - sometimes over a few days to weeks, and will frequently result in serious vision impairment or complete vision loss. In order to ensure that your dog receives urgent (and often times vision-saving) care immediately, ask your veterinarian for a referral to an ophthalmologist if your dog receives a diagnosis of diabetes.

Surgical correction of cataracts is the best, most effective treatment for vision restoration and continued normal activity

for the affected pet. To date, there is no concrete scientific data that has shown medical therapy (eye drops) to be an effective treatment route for reversing cataracts. Like in human cataract treatment, veterinary ophthalmologists use a procedure called phacoemulsification in order to remove cataracts. Cataract surgery entails making a very small incision into the cornea with a microsurgical instrument, then the cataract is broken up using a phacoemulsification unit to fragment the affected lens by using ultrasonic vibrations. Finally, the lens pieces are aspirated out of the eye. After the affected lens has been completely removed using phacoemulsification, a new artificial lens specifically designed for either dogs or cats, is placed where the previous cataractous lens was located. This procedure is highly successful, and most animals have some degree of vision immediately upon recovery from anesthesia. In most cases, patients are able to go home the same day of surgery!

Cataracts are a very common ophthalmic problem in pets but are certainly not the only reason animals might need to see an ophthalmologist. If you think that your pet might be experiencing vision loss, eye irritation, ulcers, or other ophthalmic issues, contact your family veterinarian and ask about getting a referral to the Gulf Coast Veterinary Ophthalmology department. For more information about GCVS or Gulf Coast Veterinary Ophthalmology, visit our website at [www.gcv.com](http://www.gcv.com), or call us at 713-693-1193.