

'Dry Eye' or Keratoconjunctivitis

'Dry eye' is an eye disease commonly found in dogs. It occurs when insufficient tears are produced from the tear glands. Tears are essential to keep the eye moist and healthy. The condition is diagnosed by measuring tear production using a 'Schirmer Tear Test'. In most cases, both eyes are affected.

Symptoms

- Recurrent conjunctivitis
- A sticky grey/white/green discharge from one or both eyes
- Clouding or dullness of the surface of the eye
- Discomfort – your pet may blink more than normal or rub at its eyes

Treatment

Most cases of dry eye will need lifelong management. The main aim of treatment is to keep your dog's eyes comfortable, free from infection and to preserve vision by increasing tear production or by giving artificial tears. Treatments will vary from case to case and depend on the suspected cause of the condition. Possible options include the following:

Medication to stimulate tear production

In most cases, the first-line treatment is cyclosporine eye ointment (Optimmune™). Optimmune treats the underlying causes of dry eye (destruction of the tear glands by the body's immune system) and, as such, is the best treatment in mild to moderate cases. It is usually very effective. Lifelong treatment is usually required. If Optimmune is ineffective, different eye drops may be used.

Artificial tears

These include drops, gels and ointments to keep the surface of your dog's eye moist and prevent evaporation of tears. These products do not treat the underlying cause, but help to replace the tears that are not being produced by your dog.

Antibiotics

Corneal ulcers and bacterial infections occur quite commonly in dogs with dry eye, and antibiotic drops may be prescribed from time to time.

Surgery

Parotid Duct Transposition (PDT) can be performed should medication prove unsuccessful. The surgery involves moving a salivary duct from its usual opening into the mouth to inside the lower eyelid. Saliva is then secreted onto the surface of the eye and acts to 'mimic' tears and keep the surface of the eye moist. It is important to stress that, even after surgery, lifelong management may still be needed to keep the face clean and treat any complications that can occasionally be caused by saliva being present in the eye instead of tears.

Summary

Whatever treatment is advised, management will usually be needed for the duration of your dog's life and regular visits to your vet will be needed. During these visits, the health of the

eye will be checked, tear production will be reassessed and any side effects of the treatment strategies will be monitored.

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