

“RED EYE” IN THE DOG
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Dogs have very beautiful eyes, however they are subject to many eye diseases. Today we are going to discuss some of the more common eye diseases that affect dogs that result in an eye being described as red or irritated. “Red eye” is a descriptive term often used when an eye is painful, as the tissue lining the eye becomes inflamed or engorged.

The basic anatomy of the eye is the same in any kind of animal or human. The front clear tissue is the cornea, which is partially covered by the eyelids. Dogs have an upper and lower eyelid, as well as a third eyelid. Inside the eye is the iris (the colored portion of the eye), the lens, and the retina.

The majority of the diseases that we will discuss today are not breed specific. They can occur in any breed of dog, at any time of the year. We will divide this discussion into conjunctivitis, corneal ulcers, uveitis, and glaucoma (increased intraocular pressure), which are some of the most common causes of red eyes in dogs.

CLINICAL SIGNS or SYMPTOMS:

A red eye is often a painful eye. Pain is shown as one or a combination of the following signs in most of our canine patients: squinting, tearing, rubbing, anorexia, third eyelid protrusion, and ocular discharge of varying types. Almost any eye problem can occur as a red eye, as most eye conditions result in inflammation.

CONJUNCTIVITIS

Conjunctiva is the pink tissue that covers the eyeball and eyelids. Conjunctivitis is infection or inflammation of the conjunctiva. Conjunctivitis can be a primary disease, or a symptom or other ocular disease. The eye gets red (or has conjunctivitis) in nearly all types of eye disease. Specific causes of conjunctivitis include: allergies, infections (bacteria, viral, fungal), dry eye, and rarely parasites. Diagnostic tests that your veterinarian may perform included Schirmer tear test (to diagnose dry eye), cytology and culture (to look for cell types and infectious organisms). Treatment is to determine the underlying cause, and use initially broad-spectrum antibiotic topically. The eye should be cleaned before application of antibiotic ointment. Allergic conjunctivitis occurs fairly frequently in dogs. There may be a seasonal occurrence, associated with many allergens and more often “itchy eyes”. It is important to try and remove the allergen (if possible)!

Dry eye (keratoconjunctivitis sicca or KCS) is a very common cause of conjunctivitis in dogs. Your veterinarian should test for this by use of a tear strip. The cause is often immune-mediated, but sometimes underlying systemic disease (hypothyroidism, middle ear disease) can result in dry eye.

CORNEAL ULCERATION

Corneal ulceration refers to an eye that has been traumatized and is missing the overlying epithelium and varying amounts of the corneal stroma. Eyes that have a corneal ulcer are red and painful. Animals will squint, rub, and tear. Ulcers can result from trauma or infection. Your veterinarian will use fluorescein dye to evaluate the size and depth of the ulcer. Untreated, infected ulcers can progress rapidly and perforate. Ulcers are not to be taken lightly. Remember that all red eyes should be stained with fluorescein to look for ulcers!

UVEITIS

Uveitis is inflammation or infection of the inner tissue parts of the eye (the iris, ciliary body, and choroid). It is usually painful, and results in a red eye. There are many causes of uveitis in the dog; infectious, secondary to corneal or scleral disease, ocular manifestation of systemic disease, immune-mediated, idiopathic, toxic, and traumatic.

GLAUCOMA

Glaucoma (or increased intraocular pressure in the eye) can also cause a dog to have a red and painful eye. Pain manifested as depression, anorexia, rubbing at the eye, and/or squinting is common. If the pressure continues to elevate, blindness will occur. There are numerous medical and surgical treatments for glaucoma. The primary goal of therapy is to retain vision. Once that fails, the goal is to keep the animal comfortable and minimize pain.

Glaucoma is fairly common, and has been reported to occur in numerous breeds of dogs. Different breeds are susceptible to different types of glaucoma.