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EYELASH ABNORMALITIES

There are two main types of eyelash abnormalities in pets: distichia and ectopic cilia.

Distichiasis is when extra eyelashes grow from the glands of the eyelid. As the hair grows, it exits from the gland opening along the eyelid margin. In some cases, these eyelashes (distichia), rub on the cornea causing irritation, tearing and occasionally corneal abrasions. Distichiasis is considered to be an inherited condition in purebred dogs and can be seen in a wide variety of breeds. Commonly affected breeds include: Cocker Spaniel, Golden Retriever, Bulldog, Lhasa Apso, Mastiff and Shih Tzu. This disorder is seen rarely in the cat. Clinical signs vary depending on the number, size, position and stiffness of eyelashes.

An ectopic cilia is an extra eyelash which grows from the gland of the eyelid, but instead of exiting along the eyelid margin, the extra eyelash protrudes from the underside of the eyelid. This results in constant rubbing of the extra eyelash on the surface of the eye. Ectopic cilia most often occurs on the upper eyelid, and can cause chronic recurrent corneal ulcers.

Signs

Signs that suggest eyelash abnormalities include squinting, tearing, redness and discoloration of the cornea.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is made by visual inspection of the eye using a microscope. Fluorescein staining of the cornea is usually performed to detect any corneal abrasions or ulcers.

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Treatment

Some asymptomatic dogs with fine distichia may require no treatment at all, and some may be managed conservatively. Dogs with mild clinical signs from distichia such as tearing may improve with ophthalmic lubricants ointments. The ointment protects the cornea and coats the lashes in an oily film.

Surgical correction is performed to remove the lashes and kill the hair follicles if the dog is bothered by the lashes, or if they are causing corneal changes. The eyelid glands and abnormal hair follicles can be destroyed using either electrocautery (if only a small number of distichia) or cryotherapy (if there are numerous distichia). Regrowth of hairs is a common problem and may necessitate repeated surgeries. Eruption of new hairs at new locations may also occur.

Ectopic cilia requires surgical removal of the offending eyelid gland and hair. Growth of new hairs at new locations is possible.

Home Care and Prevention

Administer all medication and return for follow-up as directed. Dogs treated with medical therapy should be re-examined periodically, especially if they start to show new clinical signs. Following surgery postoperative rechecks are often required to monitor for regrowth of the eyelashes or development of new eyelashes.

There is no preventative care for distichiasis, although the breeding of two affected dogs to each other should be discouraged.