



Animal Heart & Eye Center, 91 NE 6<sup>th</sup> St, Homestead FL 33030  
Ph 305-246-1701 www.vetsi.com

## **CANINE CATARACTS**

Teresa Tucci, DVM, DACVO  
Board Certified in Ophthalmology

A cataract simply put is lens opacity. Depending of the degree of opacification, vision loss can be partial or complete. In early stages of cataract development you may not see the cataracts. Some cataracts will develop or mature rapidly, even in a matter of days, while others can take months to years and some will develop and never change. Each pet is evaluated on an individual basis. A complete ophthalmic examination will consist of several parts, including tear testing, an intraocular pressure evaluation and a special corneal stain. The Schirmer Tear Test evaluates the amount of tears produced as well as the quality of the tears. This test is also a screen for a condition called Keratoconjunctivitis Sicca or Dry Eye. The Intraocular Pressure Test taken with an instrument called a Tonopen measures the pressure within the eye. This test will help determine if Glaucoma (an increase) or inflammation (a decrease) is present. Dyes will be used on the cornea to detect deficits on the corneal surface. After the evaluation of the superficial structures, an intraocular examination will be performed. The doctor will discuss the findings of the examination with you as she performs these procedures. Prior to cataract surgery additional tests will need to be scheduled. The first of these tests is an intraocular ultrasound (U/S). The second examination is called an Electrocardiogram (ERG). This test uses special lights and intensities to evaluate the ability of the retina to receive light. If the ERG test comes back as a 'flat line' – removal of the cataracts will not restore vision and cataract surgery is not recommended. If all the preliminary testing is within normal limits, cataract surgery will be scheduled.

In most cases, the option of putting in replacement lenses is offered. In some cases however it is not possible to safely place the replacement lens into the eye. This does not mean that your pet will not be able to see just because there is no lens – it means that your pets near vision 1-15 feet will be blurry. Most pets adjust very well to this disability after a short time.

**Following surgery your job as the owner / caregiver / medication administrator is vital to the success can include:**

- 1. Administration of medications as prescribed.**
- 2. Restrict activity level and only walk your pet on a harness.**
- 3. Keeping the Buster collar on at all times unless otherwise directed by the doctor.**
- 4. Schedule and keep all recheck appointments.**
- 5. Report any changes you may notice to your doctor.**

## **#1 Medications:**

Following surgery you will be given several medications to place into your pet's eyes. These are usually in drop (liquid) form and the average dosage to begin is 4 times daily to the operated eye(s). When using multiple medications you must wait 5 minutes after using one before you place the next one into the eye. It is necessary to space the medications out EVENLY throughout the 24-hour period. For example, a medication given 4 times a day can be:

Waking up  
Before work  
After work  
Before bed

Making a chart is most helpful – especially if more than one family member is going to be giving the medications. These medications are NECESSARY to reduce the inflammation normally caused by the cataract surgery and to prevent infection at the surgical site. The dedicated administration of the medication is almost as important as the surgery itself to a positive outcome of cataract removal.

## **#2 Restriction of activity:**

It is also very important to restrict your pet's activity. Running, jumping, playing and barking can raise the blood pressure and also raise the intraocular pressure. A rise in the intraocular pressure can cause an increase in inflammation in the operated eye(s), therefore increasing the risk of post-operative complications. It is also VERY important to use a harness or put a leash around a front leg while walking your pet. A collar or choke collar can put pressure around the neck and increase the intraocular pressure.

## **#3 Elizabeth (Buster) collar:**

An Elizabeth or Buster collar will be placed on your pet following surgery. The collar MUST remain on at ALL times until the doctor releases your pet from it. Most dogs object to the collar initially but with encouragement from you they will adjust. Placing the food and water dishes on a pedestal of some sort may help. If your pet has a 'wet face' or drools a lot, you must keep the inside of the collar clean to keep bacterial contamination away from the surgery site. It may be necessary to wipe out the inside of the collar several times during the day if this is the case.

## **#4 Schedule and KEEP all recheck appointments:**

Your doctor will want to monitor your pet's progress very closely during the healing process. Complications can arise suddenly and should be addressed promptly to help insure an uneventful and visual recovery. Please call the doctor with any questions as soon as possible.

## **Some commonly asked questions----**

### **If the cataracts are removed, can they return?**

NO- the lens is removed at the time of cataracts surgery and they do not regrow.

**Will my pet see again?**

Pre-surgical tests are performed to assure that your pet has the best possible chance for restoration and preservation of vision. It is also important to give post-surgical medications exactly as prescribed. Also – DO NOT RUN OUT OF PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS.

**If you remove the lens and are unable to place an Intraocular Lens Implant in will my pet be able to see?**

YES. Your pet will see distance very well; close vision 2-10 feet will be blurred – rather like a person without their reading glasses on.

**My pet is old, is the surgery safe?**

As long as your pet is in good general health and has had a pre-anesthetic physical exam and laboratory work up within the expected limits age is not a big factor. Today's anesthetics are very safe for older pets.

**My pet is diabetic, does that mean she will be slower in healing?**

Not typically – healing in diabetic pets will occur very similar as in non-diabetic pets. We recommend diabetic patients to be regulated as possible.

**How long does my pet have to wear the collar?**

Until your doctor releases your pet, this is commonly 1 week.

**How long do I have to give the medications?**

Some pets will heal more rapidly than others, or have post surgical complications requiring longer treatment. The usual length of time is approximately 3-6 months on a decreasing dosage.