



Red Eye

Basics

OVERVIEW

- Redness (known as “hyperemia”) of the eyelids or involving blood vessels in the eye or moist tissues (known as the “conjunctiva”) of the eye, or bleeding within the eye

SIGNALMENT/DESCRIPTION OF PET

Species

- Dogs
- Cats

SIGNS/OBSERVED CHANGES IN THE PET

- Depend on cause
- May affect one or both eyes
- Result of generalized (systemic) disease—signs associated with abnormalities in other organ systems

CAUSES

- Virtually every case fits into one or more of the following categories:
 - Inflammation of the eyelids (known as “blepharitis”)
 - Inflammation of the moist tissues of the eye (known as “conjunctivitis”)
 - Inflammation of the cornea (the clear outer layer of the front of the eye; condition known as “keratitis”)
 - Inflammation of the white, firm, outer portion of the eyeball (known as “scleritis”)
 - Inflammation of the front part of the eye, including the iris (known as “anterior uveitis”)
 - Disease of the eye, in which the pressure within the eye is increased (known as “glaucoma”)
 - Blood in the anterior chamber of the eye (the front part of the eye, between the cornea and the iris; accumulation of blood known as “hyphema”)
 - Disease of the bony cavity containing the eyeball (known as “orbital disease”)—usually the orbital abnormality is more prominent than the “red eye”

RISK FACTORS

- Generalized (systemic) infectious or inflammatory diseases
- Lack of capacity to develop an immune response (known as “immunocompromise”)
- Blood-clotting disorders (known as “coagulopathies”)
- Generalized (systemic) high blood pressure (known as “hypertension”)
- Irritation by medications applied to the eye directly (known as “topical ophthalmic medications”)—aminoglycosides; pilocarpine; epinephrine

- Cancer
- Trauma

Treatment

HEALTH CARE

- Usually outpatient
- Elizabethan collar may be used to prevent self-trauma
- Avoid dirty environments or those that may lead to eye trauma, especially if topical (applied to the eye directly) steroids are used
- Consider referral to a veterinary ophthalmologist (eye specialist)
- Few causes of “red eye” are fatal; however, a workup may be indicated (especially with inflammation of the front part of the eye, including the iris [anterior uveitis] and blood in the anterior chamber of the eye [hyphema]) to rule-out potentially fatal generalized (systemic) diseases

SURGERY

- Deep corneal ulcers (loss of tissue on the surface of the cornea [the clear part of the front of the eye]); and glaucoma (condition where pressure within the eye is increased)—surgical treatment may be best

Medications

- Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered as all inclusive
 - Depend on specific cause
 - Generally, control eye pain, inflammation, infection, and intraocular pressure (IOP); increased IOP indicates glaucoma
 - Aspirin—may control mild eye pain and inflammation; use as directed by your pet's veterinarian
 - Carprofen to control pain and inflammation
 - Flunixin meglumine—may be used in dogs with severe eye inflammation

Follow-Up Care

PATIENT MONITORING

- Depends on cause
- Repeat eye examinations as required to ensure that eye pain, inflammation, and intraocular pressure are well controlled
- The greater the risk of loss of vision, the more closely the pet needs to be followed; may require daily or more frequent examination

PREVENTIONS AND AVOIDANCE

- Depend on cause

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Loss of the eye or permanent vision loss
- Long-term (chronic) eye pain and inflammation
- Death, if “red eye” is secondary to a generalized (systemic) disease process

EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- Depend on cause

Key Points

- Redness (known as “hyperemia”) of the eyelids or involving blood vessels in the eye or moist tissues (conjunctiva) of the eye, or bleeding within the eye
- May affect one or both eyes
- Possible complications include loss of the eye or permanent vision loss; long-term (chronic) eye pain and

inflammation; and in some cases, death (if “red eye” is secondary to a generalized [systemic] disease process)

Notes

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