



Cataracts & Your Pet

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Cataracts are one of the most common eye problems affecting pets. They can affect all breeds and ages of dogs and cats, but the condition is found more commonly in certain dog breeds, such as Cockers, Poodles, Miniature Schnauzers and Terriers.

The normal, transparent lens in the eye focuses beams of light onto the retina so that your pet can see clearly. A cataract is a disruption of the normal arrangement of the lens fibers that interferes with sight by partially or completely blocking the clarity of the lens. A cataract may be quite small and not significantly interfere with your pet's vision, but if the cataract becomes dense enough, vision may be lost.

It is not unusual for your pet's eyes to become slightly blue-gray as they age. As a normal part of the aging process, the lens becomes thicker, making the eyes appear grayer. This condition, called nuclear sclerosis, usually occurs in dogs over six years of age and typically does not affect their vision. Therefore treatment for this condition is not recommended.

Cataracts can be hereditary or due to old age. Inherited conditions are the most common cause of cataracts and may be present at birth or develop when the animal is very young. They can also be caused by injury, or illness such as diabetes. If your pet's cataracts are due to an underlying condition, such as diabetes, treating the condition may diminish the cataracts.

There is no effective medical treatment for cataracts. Cataracts are not painful, but when your pet has trouble navigating due to vision loss, his sight can be restored to near normal through surgery. A veterinary ophthalmologist will surgically remove the lens, replacing it with a plastic or acrylic prosthetic lens to allow for more focused vision. Cataract surgery generally has a 90-95% success rate, but it is also a very delicate procedure that requires extensive postoperative care by the pet owner.

After surgery, your pet will have to wear a protective collar (Elizabethan Collar) until his eye heals and you will need to keep him quiet and calm. Your pet will also require eye drops to be administered several times a day for a few weeks.

You and your veterinarian can decide if cataracts are affecting your pet's vision enough to warrant surgery. For more information, consult with your veterinarian.