



## Corneal (Eye) Ulcers

Corneal ulcers are erosions, sores or scrapes on the surface of the eye (cornea). They are very common in dogs and cats and can occur from a variety of causes. A scratch from another animal or self-trauma, chemical irritation (eg. soap in the eye from bathing), trauma from a foreign object, and inflammation within the eye from allergies or viral infections are common causes of corneal ulcers. Bacterial and fungal infections can lead to ulcer formation or can be opportunistic infections. Other conditions that cause lack of tear production (dry eye) can also lead to ulcers.

Signs of a corneal ulcer include:

- Squinting or frequent blinking or rubbing of the eye
- Redness of the white part or conjunctival tissue around the eye
- Discharge from the eye
- Cloudiness of the eye

**Diagnosis** is typically made by staining the eye with fluorescein stain. The stain will stick to the ulcer or scratch and highlight the wound under a blue cobalt filtered light. Some very deep ulcers may not take up the stain and in these cases diagnosis is made on other examination findings. Severe or poorly healing ulcers may require cytology and culture of the eye and/or eye discharge.

**Treatment** will involve topical antibiotics. Pain medication is also often needed. It is critical that eye ulcers be treated immediately and monitored closely. A cone-collar (Elizabethan collar) should be placed on the patient to prevent self-trauma to the eye.

**Close monitoring of the eye is very important.** If the eye is not improving or looks worse at any point during treatment, we should recheck immediately. Corneal ulcers are painful, and they can quickly worsen. Severe ulcers can lead to permanent loss of vision and/or the eye.

A recheck appointment and eye staining will be needed every 3-5 days after starting treatment to ensure complete healing.

Some ulcers can be more persistent or complicated to resolve. Indolent ulcers are corneal ulcers that are unable to heal due to formation of a lip that prevents complete closure. In these cases, a debridement procedure to remove this lip and stimulate healing and/or additional medication may be needed.

In some cases, severe ulcers are considered emergency situations. Deep corneal ulcers called “melting ulcers” can occur with severe bacterial or fungal infections. The eye usually has thick gooey discharge and the cornea appears soft. The cornea can actually rupture. Another type of deep corneal ulcer that can lead to eye rupture is called a Descemetocoele. Surgery is often needed in these cases.