

Points on Pets: Veterinary ophthalmologist should look into dog's eye problem

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: After having our dog examined because she had a lot of hair matted around her left eye, our veterinarian told us that our dog has an ulcer on her cornea. Although our veterinarian could not tell us what caused this problem originally, she thought that our dog might have scratched her cornea while running under our bushes.

We are now worried that our dog might have to have her eye removed. If so, will she look gross? Will she be able to function normally with only one eye? We are just sick about this situation.

A: Without seeing your dog and without having much more information, it is impossible to predict whether or not your dog will eventually have to have her left eye removed. However, you should express your concerns about this to your veterinarian.

If you are not satisfied with the information that your veterinarian can provide, you should ask for a referral to a veterinary ophthalmologist. You will likely be able to find a veterinary ophthalmologist at a large referral veterinary hospital in a large city in your area or at any of the teaching hospitals at the 28 veterinary colleges throughout the United States. Certainly getting a second opinion is always justified and doing so will give you peace of mind that you are doing everything possible to save your dog's eye.

Your local veterinarian should not be offended that you want a second opinion. Most corneal problems in dogs start out as simple lesions such as scratches. Excessive blinking, excessive tearing which leads to matting, excessive pawing at the eyes, and avoiding bright lights are common signs of corneal lesions. Most simple corneal lesions can be treated by regular administration of appropriate eye ointments. However, most eye problems left untreated become very serious problems within a short period of time.

Most dogs with only one eye do not look gross. Some ophthalmologists actually install artificial eyes in dogs to improve their appearances. Likewise, most dogs with only one eye function normally. Having only one eye should not in any way change your relationship with your loyal four-footed furry companion.

Q: We recently noticed that our old basset hound has a large swelling on the inside of her ear. It seems like our dog has always done a lot of scratching at her ears and shakes her head a lot.

Is this the reason for the swelling? Should we take our dog to our veterinarian to have her ears examined?

A: It is very likely that your old basset hound has a hematoma on the inside of her ear. This is a common condition caused by the hemorrhage of blood under the skin of the ear. Therefore, the swelling is most likely just a large blood clot. Most likely the head shaking has caused the rupture of small blood vessels within the exterior part of the ear.

You should have your dog examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible. Very small hematomas can sometimes be reduced in size by simply removing the blood through a needle into a syringe. Larger hematomas often require surgery to reduce their size.

Keeping your dog's ears clean and preventing insect bites, such as those caused by flies, usually decreases the frequency of head shaking and scratching. Your veterinarian can give you additional advice about how to handle this situation and regarding the care of your aging four-footed companion.

Send e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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