Points on Pets: The eyes are now cloudy all day

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: Is it possible for dogs to have cataracts? Our 12-year-old miniature schnauzer does not seem to see as well as she did when she was younger. She used to sit in front of the window and watch the birds and rabbits in our backyard. She does not do this any more. We have also noticed that her eyes look cloudy. We wonder if there is a connection between her cloudy eyes and her lack of interest in looking out of the window.

A: It is impossible to tell whether or not your dog has cataracts without actually seeing her. However, it is possible that she does have them. A cataract is simply an opacity or cloudiness within the lens of the eye. Cataracts are categorized as developmental or degenerative, depending on their cause and when they are diagnosed.

Cataracts categorized as developmental are most often seen in young dogs and are usually due to inheritance, poor nutrition, or infections within the eyes. Although the breeds in which developmental cataracts are most common are miniature and toy poodles, cocker spaniels, wire-haired fox terriers, miniature schnauzers, Boston bull terriers, golden retrievers, beagles, German shepherds, pointers and Afghan hounds; the exact mode of inheritance is not fully understood.

Common causes of degenerative cataracts include old age or senility, diseases such as diabetes, injuries to the eye, radiation and a large group of toxins.

You should have your dog examined by your veterinarian and/or a veterinary ophthalmologist located at a veterinary teaching hospital associated with a veterinary college or at a referral veterinary hospital located in a large city. While surgery to correct cataracts in dogs is common, it should only be done by a veterinarian with specialized training.

Before having cataract surgery performed, any predisposing diseases or conditions should be diagnosed and treated. Because many dogs with cataracts have predisposing diseases, not all dogs fully recover their sight following cataract surgery. Your veterinarian can give you more advice regarding your dog.

Q: During the last several weeks our small mixed breed dog has had several seizures. These do not last very long and our dog seems to be normal following these episodes. Is it possible that our dog has epilepsy? We are very attached to our little dog and would hate to lose him.

A: Although uncommon in dogs, it is possible your dog has epilepsy. However, because there are many causes for seizures in dogs, you should have your dog examined by your veterinarian as soon as possible.

Your local veterinarian might refer you to a veterinary neurologist for additional diagnostic procedures and recommendations. After a definitive diagnosis is determined your veterinarian will prescribe an appropriate treatment for your four-footed family member.

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