



CORNEAL ULCERS

What is the Cornea?

The cornea is the clear window in the front of the eyeball that allows light to enter the eye. It is quite thin, has no blood vessels, and is composed of four distinct layers. It is very sensitive and readily reacts to irritants from inside or outside of the eye. The outermost layer is the surface epithelium or "skin."

Since there are no blood vessels of any kind in the cornea, it must get its oxygen and nutrients from the air outside the eye and the liquid immediately behind it inside the eye.

What is a Corneal Ulcer?

If the superficial epithelium is cut or otherwise opened, this condition is called a corneal ulcer. The depth that the ulcer goes into the cornea is very significant. With proper treatment shallow ulcers may heal rapidly, whereas deep ulcers may be very difficult to heal. If the ulcer perforates the cornea, the entire eye may become infected and infection can travel up the optic nerve to the brain. Because of this possibility, even shallow ulcers are considered a very serious condition.

ALL corneal ulcers are very painful.

What Causes a Corneal Ulcer?

Trauma is the most common cause of corneal ulcers. Trauma includes scratches from plants or other pets, foreign bodies in the eye, shampoo irritation, and abrasion from rubbing the eye on the carpet or lawn. Other causes of corneal ulcers include bacterial infection, congenital defects, virus infection, and nutritional abnormalities. An open cornea is very vulnerable to bacterial infection and tissue degradation.

What are the Signs of a Corneal Ulcer?

Because they are painful, the most obvious sign of a corneal ulcer is a pet that is squinting or otherwise acting like its eye is tender. There may be mucus or pus in the eye. The eyelid undersides may be red and inflamed. The ulcer may be visible on the cornea, but confirmation requires that we stain the eye with fluorescein dye. This dye will enter the cornea only if the epithelium has an opening in it. The dye glows under a ultraviolet light ("black light"). Sometimes the cornea may be milky or cloudy when it is ulcerated, but it is often clear.

How are Corneal Ulcers Treated

The treatment will vary according to the severity and the cause of the ulcer. Treatments may include topical eye medicines, oral or injectable medicines, and even surgery.

If your pet wants to rub its eye, an Elizabethan collar will help to protect the eye. Bright light is painful to your pet's eye, so keep it indoors until the eye is normal. Weekly or more frequent reexaminations until the ulcer heals are important in the treatment of corneal ulcers.

Special Instructions: _____

Your next appointment is _____

Call Us If...

- Your pet's eye appears to be getting worse.
- You notice any degradation in your pet's general health.
- You have trouble giving the prescribed medicine.

Thank you for this opportunity to serve you!

Cornea

