

## Corneal ulceration

A common cause of sore, weeping eyes

The cornea is the clear outer layer that covers the globe of the eye. Ulceration of the cornea is a common eye condition in both horses and dogs.

Causes of corneal ulceration include trauma (eg due to grass seeds or cat scratches), dry or prominent eyes, entropion (rolled in eyelids), extra eyelashes, inflammation and infection. Some canine breeds are predisposed to corneal ulceration, such as pugs, shih tzus and boxers.

The clinical signs of corneal ulceration are sore, discharging eyes. Animals will often close or partially close their eyes when they are sore. The discharge may be watery but is more often a thick brown to yellow fluid.

If your animal has a sore, discharging eye, it is best to book a visit to the vet as soon as possible. Eye conditions can often progress rapidly so it is important to start treatment early in the disease course.

To diagnose a corneal ulcer, the vet will often place some dye into your pet's eye to highlight the area of ulceration. They may also examine behind the eyelids for an inciting cause of ulceration (such as a grass seed). Horses will often need some local anaesthetic injected above the affected eye to block the nerve and prevent eyelid closure during the examination. Other diagnostic tests may also include an ophthalmic examination and measurement of tear production.

Treatment options for corneal ulceration in horses and dogs vary depending on the cause, severity and duration of the ulceration. For uncomplicated cases, treatment often involves an antibiotic eye ointment and an oral anti-inflammatory.

**Corneal ulceration is often simple to treat. If left untreated, however, it can progress to serious inflammation within the eye and, in some cases, permanent blindness**

Sometimes the pupil will need to be dilated using ointment or drops to facilitate examination of the eye and prevent adhesions forming within the eye. When this is the case, the animal's eye needs to be protected from bright light. This can be done using an eye patch sewn on to a mesh fly veil for horses (the cup of an old bra often works well), or by keeping dogs indoors during the middle of the day.

For non-healing or severe ulcers, surgery may be indicated. This often involves suturing the third eyelid across the globe to act as a protective, moisturising barrier. Microbial culture of the affected corneal surface may also be needed.

Surgery to correct anatomical defects such as entropion may help to prevent recurrence of ulceration and help your pet to live a comfortable, happy life.



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