

THIRD EYELID GLAND PROLAPSE ('CHERRY EYE')

What is a 'cherry eye'?

The term 'cherry eye' describes a problem with the third eyelid gland.

Dogs have an extra eyelid, called the third eyelid. It is tucked away in the inner corner of the eye. The third eyelid acts like a windscreen wiper, sweeping across the eye to spread the tears across the surface of the eye. At the base of the third eyelid, there is a tear gland - this is called the third eyelid gland (also known as the nictitans gland). The gland is important to produce tears and keep the surface of the eye wet.

The gland cannot normally be seen because it is attached strongly to the bone below the eye and is hidden out of the way. If that attachment breaks, the gland can move, and pop up, so it is visible.

What does a 'cherry eye' look like?

A 'cherry eye' looks like a small pink lump, or cherry (!), in the corner of the eye (the inner corner nearest the nose). It might come and go, or might be visible all the time.



Which dogs are at risk?

Any dog can develop 'cherry eye'. It is most common in young dogs less than two years old. Bulldog puppies often develop 'cherry eye' quite young, approximately three months old.

'Cherry eye' can occur in any breed but is common in all types of Bulldogs (English, French, others), Cocker Spaniel, ShihTzu, Lhasa Apso, Beagle, and Mastiff-type breeds. Cross-breeds can also be affected.

Does 'cherry eye' cause a problem?

When the gland is in the wrong position, it does not work properly, so it produces less tears to keep the eye wet. In the long-term, this can cause 'dry eye'.

It causes a mild 'sticky' discharge from the eye, conjunctivitis and sometimes mild irritation. It is not painful but some dogs may close the eyelids more and rub the eye.

Is there any treatment for 'cherry eye'?

Yes, surgery is the recommended treatment. There are several different surgical techniques - the most common technique is called a 'pocket' technique. This involves creating a space or 'pocket' within the base of the third eyelid, to push the gland back into a more normal position. The 'pocket' technique can be performed alone, or in combination with other techniques (anchoring techniques and reinforcement sutures).



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Can 'cherry eye' happen in the other eye?

Yes, it is common for both eyes to be affected, but not necessarily at the same time. This can influence the timing of the surgery (see later).

What will my pet need?

BEFORE THE SURGERY

Your pet will need to be assessed by the ophthalmologist to see if surgery is an option. This is the Initial Referral Consultation. It is a one-hour appointment for a detailed assessment of your dog's eyes, and a detailed discussion.

AROUND THE SURGERY

Your pet will need a general anaesthetic and to stay in the hospital for the day or overnight. The length of the general anaesthetic varies depending on surgery being done on one or two eyes. Routine operating days are Mondays and Wednesdays. Your pet will be admitted the afternoon before or at around 8am on the day of surgery, depending on our schedule that week.

DO I NEED TO BRING ANYTHING FOR THE SURGERY?

We provide everything but you are welcome to bring a bed, favourite toy and any special food. Please bring all medication.



AFTER THE SURGERY

Your pet will need:

- Rest for five to seven days – this means shorter walks and no toys
- To wear a protective collar to stop eye rubbing for one to two weeks
- Harness and lead rather than collar and lead (to reduce pressure on the neck, which can cause affect the pressure in and around the eyes)
- Medications by mouth, once or twice daily (painkillers, anti-inflammatory drugs and sometimes antibiotics)
- Eye drops – most patients have one to two different eye drops; the drops are done in the day time only and we provide clear instructions and a medication chart to help with this
- Follow-ups – see next page

Most of the healing occurs in the first two weeks.



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Is the surgery painful?

No, most eyes are very comfortable after the surgery. The eye may have a mild sticky discharge for several days, and the third eyelid will be more obvious, pink and slightly puffy/swollen.

Do any stitches need to be removed?

No. The stitches used in the surgery will dissolve over several weeks.

What is the success rate of the surgery?

The average success rate is 90%. This applies to the first surgery in routine breeds. If surgery has already been performed, the success rate is reduced to 50% - every case is different.

What complications can occur?

The gland can re-prolapse, and need repeat surgery.

NB the success rate for repeat surgery is approximately 50%

Other complications include problems with the stitches, infection, corneal ulcer, unexpected discomfort, excessive redness or scar tissue. A rare complication is cyst formation, which usually requires further surgery.

Mastiff-type breeds are more prone to complications and this will be discussed during the initial consultation.

I've heard that the gland can be removed – is that true?

Up until the 1980s, it was routine for veterinary ophthalmologist to remove the prolapsed gland. However, the importance of the gland to produce tears and keep the eye wet was then recognised.

Eyes that have had the gland removed are at risk of developing dry eye. The current thinking is that the gland should be replaced and not removed. Some breeds are predisposed to both 'cherry eye' and 'dry eye'. So, even if the gland is successfully replaced, there can be a risk of 'dry eye' later in life in those breeds. The risk is however much greater if the gland is removed.



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What is the best time to do the surgery?

In general, it is best to operate sooner rather than later. However, it can affect the other eye, so sometimes we advise to wait a short time (e.g. up to a month) in some breeds. In bulldog breeds, the gland tends to get inflamed if surgery is delayed for too long, so we might recommend to operate sooner rather than waiting. Every case is different and we will advise the best option.

Follow-ups

Most patients have one check-up 10-14 days after the surgery. Some patients need a second follow-up. Most patients have the follow-up at The Ralph, but sometimes this can be done by your vet.

What are the fees involved?

The ophthalmologist will discuss the fees with you at the time of the consultation, and can email you a detailed estimate. In general, the fees can be divided into three parts: the initial consultation, the surgery, and follow-up appointments (post-operative check-ups).

I want to go ahead – what do I need to do?

Please tell the ophthalmologist at The Ralph that you wish to proceed and a date for surgery will be arranged. The ophthalmologist will send your vet a detailed report after the initial consultation to keep them in the loop.

