

Points to Remember

**The eye is a very delicate structure which does not recover easily from infections or trauma. If conjunctivitis or an abnormal discharge is present for more than one to two days without improvement, then it is important to seek veterinary treatment.*

**Most eye medications are prescription drugs and a consultation is required before these products can be dispensed. This is important as a product which may suit one eye condition may make another condition considerably worse.*

**If you feel that your dog or cat has any eye problem at all, it is wise to get it checked at an early stage as treatment is likely to be considerably cheaper and more effective long term.*

**Sometimes conjunctivitis is simply a symptom secondary to a serious systemic disease. Diagnosis of this type of problem can be difficult and require laboratory tests, x rays and examination under anaesthetic.*

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conjunctivitis in dogs and cats

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Conjunctivitis in Dogs and Cats Information

General Information: The conjunctiva is a mucous membrane similar to that of the nose and mouth, that surrounds the eyeball forming a seal with the inner surface of the eyelids. The third eyelid located in the inside corner of the eyelids is also covered in conjunctiva. Conjunctivitis is an inflammation of this membrane which becomes swollen and reddened often making it more visible. Conjunctivitis may affect one or both eyes.

Dogs and cats with conjunctivitis tend to have a discharge from their eyes. The discharge may be clear, red, thick or purulent. Frequently the eye(s) are held half closed and the third eyelid is more prominent.

A number of different conditions will cause conjunctivitis. Many are sudden in onset and respond readily to treatment, but others may be chronic or recurrent and difficult to treat.

1) Mechanical irritation, Chemical irritants, trauma and foreign bodies tend to cause sudden onset (acute) conjunctivitis. Most cases respond to treatment once the cause has been identified and corrected.

2) Immune based diseases including some allergies can cause conjunctivitis. These con-

ditions are rare in cats but more frequent in dogs. They can be very difficult to treat and realistically, management of symptoms is all that can be hoped for.

3) The most common cause of conjunctivitis in cats are the infectious agents. These may be viral, bacterial, chlamydia or mycoplasma. Some are highly contagious between cats and others are less so. In dogs, infectious conjunctivitis is not commonly seen but they are very prone to conjunctivitis of traumatic origin.

Diagnosis: In many cases diagnosis is made on the basis of clinical signs and history. Many will respond to symptomatic topical treatment. Those that are more difficult to determine the initiating cause or which don't respond to treatment may need to undergo a number of tests to more accurately assess the condition.

Some frequently used tests in dogs are a fluorescent dye test to check the integrity of the surface of the eye, and a schirmer tear test, which tests tear production. Some dogs, especially those breeds with bulging eyes such as Pekinese, Shih Tzu and Boxer are prone to developing a condition called "Dry Eye" where the tear production is inadequate to cover the eye and subsequently it becomes irritated.

In cats, it may be suggested that a conjunctival swab be taken for chlamydia. This is a simple procedure that can be carried out in the consultation with most cats. If there is evidence of systemic disease, full blood tests and tests for Feline AIDS Virus and Feline Leukaemia Virus may be suggested.

Very occasionally, biopsies of the conjunctiva under general anaesthetic may be needed as may examination under anaesthetic for in growing eye-

lashes which can be impossible to see without magnification.

Treatment: usually comprises of local application of drops and/ or ointment to the eyes. Sometimes systemic antibiotics, anti inflammatory or cortisone are needed to correct underlying problems and occasionally there is a surgical treatment which may be recommended depending on the causative agent.

Regular treatment is essential with most eye ointments and drops, needing to be instilled at least twice daily and sometimes more often. Some medications cause transient discomfort and so two people may be required to successfully instill medications, one to hold and one to treat. Usually one to two drops of drop medication is needed each time, and ointment should be smeared directly onto the surface of the eye so that blinking spreads it over the entire area.

Some eye conditions which cause conjunctivitis, such as glaucoma or dry eye may require constant medication to control the condition and prevent recurrent infections.

Some breeds of dogs and cats have tear ducts which are not fully functional and so have constant wet eyes. This can predispose them to secondary infections on a regular basis. Tear ducts can be flushed under general anaesthetic to give temporary relief but unfortunately the problem tends to recur. There is also specialist surgery which can be done to increase drainage, but this is delicate and expensive.