What You Should Know About Corneal Ulceration

The cornea is richly supplied with nerves, but normally contains no blood vessels. It consists mostly of protein, so it is susceptible to chemicals that dissolve or pass through protein. The cornea is very thin (less than 1/20 of an inch thick). Many disease processes can destroy one or all of the thin layers that make up the cornea, forming painful indentations called ulcers. Some ulcers worsen with time. They penetrate deeper into the cornea and spread across its surface. The eye may rupture with this type of ulcer.

Dogs have a higher incidence of corneal ulcers than do cats. Dog breeds with prominent eyes – such as Pekingese, pugs and Boston terriers – are most commonly affected.

Causes

Many destructive processes can cause a loss of the layers that form the cornea. Corneal ulcers can be caused by: infections of the eye with viruses, bacteria and fungi; trauma from chemicals (acids and alkalis); and foreign objects (cat claws, sticks, BB pellet). Hair or skin (eyelids and facial folds) that rubs against the corneal surface can also destroy corneal layers.

Diagnosis

An eye examination by your veterinarian will disclose the presence of corneal ulceration. This examination may also uncover the cause. A dye called fluorescein can be applied to the cornea to determine the extent of the ulcer. When a
bacterial infection is suspected, a specimen from the cornea can be collected by your veterinarian and incubated to
determine the bacterial type and the bacteria’s sensitivity to various antibiotics.

**Treatment and Home Care**
Removing the source of irritation may mean removing a foreign object from the eye, flushing chemicals from the eye or
performing surgery to correct an eyelid that curves inward. Superficial ulcers often respond to antibiotics and medications
to relieve pain. These preparations are formulated as drops and ointments that are usually placed directly on the cornea.

More serious ulcers often require surgery to remove unattached layers of the cornea, to remove pus from within the
eyeball and to provide a protective barrier to allow the cornea to heal. Many veterinarians will cover the ulcer with another
part of the eye (the conjunctiva or the third eyelid) to promote healing. Solutions containing antibiotics and pain-reducing
medications are also used with severe ulcers.

Home care for pets with corneal ulcers should include providing access to a dark part of the house because bright light
is irritating. Antibiotics and pain-reducing medications should be administered according to your veterinarian’s instructions.
A neck collar may be used to prevent pets from rubbing and pawing their eyes. Activity should be confined to leash walks
for dogs, and cats should be confined indoors until healing is complete.

**Nutritional Plan**
After your pet’s recovery from a corneal ulcer is complete, your veterinarian may suggest a dietary change based on
your pet’s age and body condition and on the presence or absence of disease in other organs and body systems. Optimal
nutrition provides for a pet’s needs based on age and activity level, but more importantly reduces the health risks
associated with feeding excess sodium, phosphorus, calcium, protein and calories. Foods that avoid these harmful
excesses and provide proper nutrition for each life stage include the Hill’s® Science Diet® brand of pet foods.

**Transitions Food**
Unless recommended otherwise by your veterinarian, gradually introduce any new food over a seven-day period. Mix
the new food with your pet’s former food, gradually increasing its proportion until only the new food is fed.

If your pet is one of the few that doesn’t readily accept a new food, try warming the canned food to body temperature,
hand feeding for the first few days, or mixing the dry food with warm water (wait ten minutes before serving). Feed only
the recommended food. Be patient but firm with your pet. This is important because the success or failure of treatment
depends to a large degree on strict adherence to the new food.

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**Home Care Instructions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client’s Name:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patient’s Name:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medication(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nutritional Recommendation:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow-Up Appointment:</td>
<td>(Hospital Stamp Area Above)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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