
Though many people mistakenly believe cataracts are a cloudy film on the surface of the eye, cataracts are actually opacities within the lens, located inside the eye.

Why did my pet get cataracts?

Most cataracts are genetically inherited, and the condition is prevalent in breeds such as Cocker Spaniels, Poodles, Siberian Huskies, Schnauzers, Golden and Labrador Retrievers, and Terriers. Cataracts can also be caused by Diabetes mellitus, trauma, inflammation, and puppy milk replacers. Many cataracts will worsen to the point of blindness, but certain types, especially in the Retriever breeds, can remain small for the entire life of the pet.

Why should cataracts be treated?

Developing cataracts leak proteins into the eye, causing an inflammatory reaction. Untreated inflammation can result in many complications, including scar formation, glaucoma, and permanent blindness.

How are cataracts treated?

To date, there is no medical treatment that can slow the progression, prevent the formation, or reverse the changes caused by a cataract. Surgical removal is the only known treatment for cataract removal in animals and humans.

Before surgery is performed, your pet will need two special procedures beyond the initial eye exam to check the health of the retina (the nerve layer in the back of the eye).

- **Ocular ultrasound:** Because of the cloudy cataract, the doctor may be unable to see abnormalities or detachments of the retina. An ultrasound allows the doctor to detect and possibly correct problems associated with the back of the eye before surgery is performed.
- **ERG (electroretinogram):** An ERG measures the electrical function of the retina. This helps the doctor determine whether or not cataract surgery would restore vision. This test is performed under heavy sedation (NOT general anesthesia) so that your pet does not move his head or eyes. The test is not painful. If your pet has little to no retinal function, removal of the cataracts may not improve his or her vision. In this case, surgery is usually not performed, and medical treatment is pursued instead.

Because of the possible complications associated with cataracts, it is important to treat cataracts whether or not surgery is performed. These treatments usually include a topical anti-inflammatory medication, and sometimes a drop that dilates the pupil and allows more light into the eye, which can help your pet see better around the cataracts.

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How is cataract surgery performed?

Cataract surgery is performed as an outpatient procedure. Depending on the specifics of your pet's cataracts, your pet's age, and the cause, we perform either a small incision technique (phacoemulsification) or a large incision method (extracapsular cataract extraction). The small incision technique is performed in over 90% of our cataract patients and carries the benefits of shorter surgery and healing times. Phacoemulsification is the same technique performed for human cataract removal; a tiny probe breaks up the cataract with ultrasonic vibration and draws out the cataract particles. Many people believe that cataract removal is done with a laser, but this is incorrect.

What is an intraocular lens implant?

The lens of the eye is what becomes the cataract, and it is removed during surgery. In most cases, an artificial lens can be placed in the eye to correct for near vision. Without these artificial lenses, your pet's distance vision after surgery will be good, but he or she may have trouble focusing on objects that are close. A lens implant will improve this. In some cases, however, the lens capsule that holds the artificial lens in place is torn or dislocated, and an implant cannot be placed.

What are the risks associated with cataract surgery?

The surgery is performed under general anesthesia. Any time a patient is placed under general anesthesia, there are risks. In order to minimize these risks, we require pre-surgical blood testing and we use the same state-of-the-art medications that are used in human hospitals. While under anesthesia, your pet's pulse rate, oxygen, CO₂, and EKG are constantly monitored. After surgery, the most common complication is increased intraocular pressure. We will monitor your pet's eye pressure for any spikes and control this (usually temporary) problem with anti-glaucoma medications. Other rare complications include infection, severe inflammation, corneal ulcers, and retinal detachment. We make every effort to avoid any complications, but as with any surgery in any species, these risks do exist.

What is the recovery like following cataract surgery?

Cataract surgery is elective and requires a significant time commitment on your part. After surgery, topical medications **MUST** be administered every 2-3 hours during the day for 2-3 weeks. Ointment is applied at bedtime and getting up in the middle of the night is not required. Patients are also sent home on an oral antibiotic, a short course of anti-inflammatory medication, and periodically an oral anti-glaucoma medication. After this initial healing period, drops are decreased to 3-4 times daily for a period of about six weeks. Medications are usually decreased at every post-operative visit, but some form of medication will be required long-term for continued success. The patient must wear a protective Elizabethan collar (i.e. a "lamp shade") for approximately 3-4 weeks after surgery to prevent self-induced trauma or rubbing. We ask that your pet not be bathed or groomed for at least 2 weeks after surgery and not be vaccinated during the six-week healing period. A 24-hour post-operative visit is required. Additional follow-ups are usually performed at 1 week, 1 month, 3 months, and then every six months following surgery. After these initial appointments, long-term check-ups are made once or twice a year depending on how well your pet has healed.

Cataract surgery requires a long-term commitment and treatment regimen. We ask that you consider your personal schedule when scheduling surgery for your pet. Vacations and other sources of stress should be avoided during the immediate post-operative period.

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What are the stages and cost of cataract treatment?

1. All new patients must first be seen for an initial comprehensive ophthalmic exam, which includes checking the intraocular pressure and tear production of the eyes.
2. An electroretinogram (ERG) and ocular ultrasound must be performed to test the retinal function, and current bloodwork must be run.
3. Based on these test results, the doctor will let you know if cataract surgery will be beneficial for your pet.

The cost of cataract surgery varies with the weight of your pet and concurrent medical conditions such as Diabetes, cardiac conditions, and other eye problems such as glaucoma. We provide personalized cost estimates to all of our clients when surgery is being considered.

The 24-hour follow-up visit is included in the cost of cataract surgery, but subsequent follow-up examinations and medications are not. Payment is due at the time services are provided, specifically at the initial exam, pre-operative testing, and on the day of surgery. We require a deposit of 50% of the cost of surgery when your pet is dropped off on surgery day, with the rest due when your pet is picked up. We accept Visa, Mastercard, Discover, and debit cards, as well as personal checks and cash. We also provide a no-interest financing option through a company called CareCredit.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to ask our outstanding support staff or the doctor. We are happy to help you!