



CATARACTS

ABOUT THE DISEASE

In normal functioning eyes, the eye lens is a clear structure located within the eye that focuses images onto the retina. A **cataract** is an abnormal cloudiness within the lens that will reduce vision as the changes worsen. **Cataracts** will threaten vision if more than 30% of the lens is affected and can lead to blindness if they are advanced.

A similar, but less serious condition that resembles **cataracts** is called nuclear sclerosis. This is a normal, older-age-related haziness of the lens that rarely compromises vision and is very common as dogs age. Rarely is there ever a need to treat nuclear sclerosis, whereas **cataracts** may cause secondary eye issues and may require treatment if severe degeneration occurs.

The most common cause of **cataracts** is heredity, but other causes include diseases such as diabetes mellitus, inflammatory processes within the eye, or even conditions that may cause low blood calcium levels. Please see the [Diabetes Mellitus](#) document for additional information.

OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

Differentiating between nuclear sclerosis and **cataracts** is often determined through a thorough physical examination performed by a veterinarian. At this same evaluation, other diagnostic testing or ophthalmological referral may be necessary to determine an underlying disease leading to the formation of **cataracts**.

Routine laboratory and urine testing are often performed to help rule out common systemic diseases.

If referral through an ophthalmologist is elected, additional specialty tests may include:

- Ultrasound of the eye – Evaluation for detached retinas or other eye defects that might be hidden by **cataracts**.
- Electroretinography – Evaluation for a functional retina. This is typically elected before eye surgery to ensure that the patient will be visual once the **cataract** is surgically removed.

TREATMENT

The process that leads to **cataract** formation is irreversible and there is no medication that will clear **cataracts** once they have formed. However, in patients where functional retinal tissue is still present, the treatment of choice is surgical removal of the **cataract** and replacement with a synthetic lens material.

The outlook for normal vision is excellent after surgical removal of **cataracts**.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Cataracts** may be the first visible evidence of underlying disease in the patient.
- Alter the patient's environment if blindness occurs so that they are kept safe from falling or harming themselves.