



## CHERRY EYE

### ABOUT THE DISEASE

Unaware by most caregivers, canine and feline patients have three functional eye lids. The third eyelid, or nictitating membrane, arises from the inner corner of the eye and covers the eye diagonally. There is a gland (nictitans gland or Harder's gland) that resides within the nictitating membrane, which is responsible for producing a substantial amount of lubrication for the eye. **Cherry eye** refers to the prolapsed gland of the nictitating membrane.

In some patients, often genetic, the fibers responsible for maintaining proper position of the nictitans gland are weak and allow the gland to prolapse, causing **cherry eye**. Once out of position, this appears as a protrusion of pink tissue in the inner corner of the eye.

In some cases where the prolapse is long-standing, or through improper surgical removal, patients are at risk for a significant reduction in tear production that may lead to corneal injury or blindness.

In severe cases, patients may develop keratoconjunctivitis sicca or dry eye. Please see the [Dry Eye](#) document for additional information.

### OBTAINING A DIAGNOSIS

A physical examination with a veterinarian often yields a definitive diagnosis.

### TREATMENT

There are no medications that will replace the gland into a proper position. However, eye medications are often used to help replace tears and keep the eye lubricated properly if the gland is in dysfunction.

The most reliable method is surgical correction, but it is not always successful. Some reports indicate upwards of 40-50% failure of surgery. However, early intervention often yields a better surgical outcome as prolonged prolapse can decrease the efficacy of a single procedure.

Removal of the nictitans gland is not recommended.

### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- There are no medical fixes, so surgery is the patient's best chances of success.
- Do not remove the nictitans gland.
- The American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists and the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) have no recommendations on restriction for breeding of dogs with **cherry eye**.
  - If there is a consistent familial history of this condition, restrictions of breeding should be considered.