

# CATARACTS

## *What is a cataract?*

Inside the eye is a lens that focuses light on the back of the eye (the retina). Vision occurs at the retina. This is similar to a camera which has a lens to focus light on the film. If the lens becomes opaque this is called a cataract. The opacity prevents the light reaching the retina and can result in blindness.

Cataracts must be differentiated from "nuclear sclerosis" which is a normal ageing process of the lens that results in it becoming harder and appearing blue in older dogs but it never causes blindness.

The cataract may develop in the nucleus (center) or periphery of the lens. Nuclear cataracts tend not to progress and hence have a better prognosis as they can see around the cataract. Peripheral cataracts will continue to develop until the entire lens is opaque and results in blindness.

## *What causes cataracts?*

The most common cause of cataracts in the dog are inherited. Other causes include injuries to the eye, other eye diseases (e.g. uveitis, retinal atrophy, glaucoma) or diseases such as diabetes mellitus ("sugar diabetes") and low calcium levels. Some appear to occur spontaneously and are age related.

## *Are some breeds more prone than others?*

Many breeds of dogs are affected with hereditary cataracts. Some of the recognized breeds include the American Cocker, Labrador, Poodle, Miniature schnauzer, Golden retriever, Siberian husky, Boston Terrier and the Welsh Springer Spaniel to mention a few.

## *Will my dog go blind?*

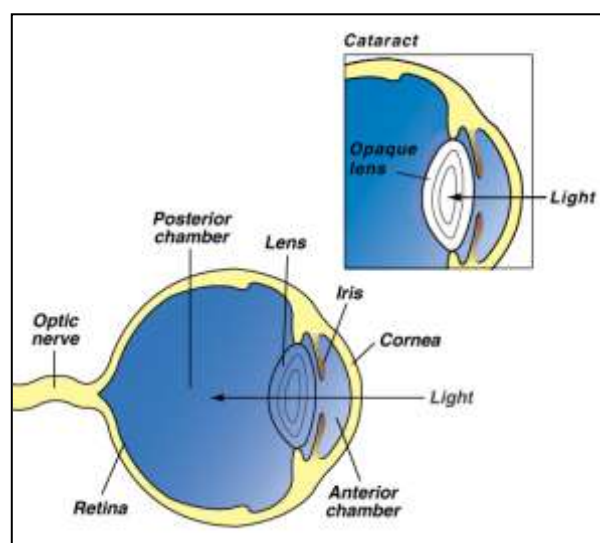
If cataracts occupy less than 30% of the lens or only one lens is affected, they rarely cause diminished vision. When the opacity reaches about 60% of the total lens area, vision impairment is usually apparent. If the opacity progresses to 100% of the lens, the dog is then blind. However, whether the cataract remains static or progresses depends on the type of cataract, the breed and other risk factors.

## *Can anything be done to prevent my dog from going blind?*

There is no medical cure for cataracts. Providing the retina is normal, veterinary ophthalmologists can remove cataracts and restore failing vision in your pet. Most pets have few complications and return to normal running and playing within a few days of the surgery. Ideally they should be examined and treated before the pet is blind (i.e. before the entire lens is a cataract). Surgical removal of cataracts also prevents secondary complications developing in the eye (e.g. lens induced uveitis)

## *How old will my dog be if he does go blind?*

Since the major cause of cataract is hereditary, cataract progression varies from breed to breed. In some breeds cataracts will develop relatively early in life whereas in others the first signs are detected when the dog is older and progression is so slow that dogs still have reasonable sight well into old age.



***If the condition is hereditary, what can be done to prevent it from being passed on?***

This is a situation where prevention is better than cure. Many organizations offer eye disease certification programs that offer breeders an excellent chance to make sure they are producing disease free puppies. We will be more than happy to discuss details with you.