

Corneal Ulcers

What is a corneal ulcer?

A corneal ulcer is a break in the outer layer of the cornea. Ulcers may occur from a variety of conditions, such as scratches, aggressive rubbing, foreign material, lack of tear production, or excessively exposed corneas. Usually ulcers, although painful, will heal on their own in 3 to 7 days. However, occasionally specialized procedures are necessary to help the ulcer heal. Superficial ulcers occur in the top layer of the cornea. Deep corneal ulcers are more serious than superficial ulcers and can become infected. Deep ulcers have the potential to rupture the eye and result in blindness or loss of the eye.

How are corneal ulcers diagnosed?

If your pet has a corneal ulcer, you may notice excessive tearing, squinting, cloudiness, or rubbing at the eye. Examination of the eye is important, so that appropriate treatment can be started. Special stains are used on the cornea to determine the size of the ulcer. Also, they help determine how strong the edges of the ulcer are, which influences treatment decisions. Sometimes, when infection is present, a bacterial culture will be taken. This helps determine which antibiotics need to be prescribed.

How are corneal ulcers treated?

Medical treatment will vary depending on the type of ulcer your pet has. Antibiotics are prescribed, and an Elizabethan collar is often used. This prevents your pet from rubbing the eye and making the ulcer worse. Deeper ulcers need stronger antibiotics and may take longer to heal. If the ulcer is very deep or soft, then surgical repair is required. In this procedure, a conjunctival graft is placed over the ulcer and sutured in place.