

Ectropion

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What is Ectropion?

Ectropion is a disorder whereby the edges of the eyelid evert, or roll outwards, causing the surface of the eye to become unusually exposed. Depending on the severity of the Ectropion, this exposure and the associated inability to keep the surface of the eye moist with tears can lead to irritation, infections, corneal damage and even vision impairment if not treated. There are two main causes of Ectropion:



1. Inherited

This is the most common form, with many breeds having a genetic predisposition. It's particularly common in those breeds that are bred to favour certain facial features such as prominent eyes and saggy skin folds.

2. Acquired

Those dogs without genetic predisposition can still acquire Ectropion, either through increasing age or disease (such as hypothyroidism), whereby weight loss and reduced muscle mass and tone around the head and eyes can cause eversion of the eyelids.

What are the signs or symptoms?

Your dog's eyelids may appear saggy, and due to the increase exposure of the eye, there is an increased chance of problems associated with foreign bodies and also conjunctivitis - inflammation of the thin membrane covering the surface of the eye and lining the eyelids. The dog's eyes may become red, inflamed, and produce a discharge, and the irritation may cause them to paw at their eye. The tears may also not be able to physically drain away from the eye properly through ducts to the nose, and instead spill out and down the face causing staining of the hair beneath the eye. The inability to keep the eye properly moist may also lead to the development of "Dry Eye" (keratoconjunctivitis sicca), which apart from causing painfully dry, burning eyes may also lead to corneal ulceration and vision impairment.

How is it diagnosed?

If your dog has inherited Ectropion it should have developed to the point of easy diagnosis by 12 months of age. Close examination will reveal the everted nature of the eyelid, but it will probably be the signs of irritation, conjunctivitis, discharge, or tear stains on the hair below the eye that will first alert you to a problem. A veterinary surgeon can put drops of a fluorescing dye into the eye to identify the extent of any corneal ulceration.

How is it treated?

If the Ectropion is mild, then keeping the eyes clean to prevent infection may be all that is required. However, as the condition becomes more severe, antibiotic eye medications may be necessary to control bouts of infection, and lubricating eye drops or ointments may need to become part of the daily routine. In chronic cases, surgery may be required.

How can you Avoid Buying a Dog with Ectropion?

As the main cause for Ectropion is genetic, screening of the parents of a puppy you are considering purchasing is important. Make sure you obtain copies of certification showing a clear examination under one of the accredited eye schemes for the sire and dam of the puppy. Responsible breeders will generally have certification done on their breeding stock on an annual basis, and will also generally choose not to breed with affected animals.

One important point to note is that if your dog has had surgery to correct ectropion, then it will be disqualified in the show ring.