

Distichiasis

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What is distichiasis?

Distichiasis is a condition whereby extra eyelashes grow on the inside edge of the upper or lower eye-lid. Because these extra eyelashes are growing much closer to the surface of the eye, some irritation or damage may occur.

What are the signs or symptoms?

Dogs with distichiasis will generally show some degree of irritation to the eye. There may be some reddening, increased tear production, pawing at the eye, and possibly ulcerations of the cornea where the eyelashes have rubbed against the surface of the eye.



How is it diagnosed?

Sometimes the extra eyelashes may be very fine or very few, and a bright light with magnification may be needed to see them.

How is it treated?

If the extra eyelashes are causing minor irritation only, then the application of an oily lubricant may offer some degree of protection. If the problem is more severe, then electrolysis to remove the lashes may be appropriate or even cryosurgery to destroy the follicles. The surgery option may provide a longer lasting solution, although even following that, it is not uncommon for regrowth to occur, and also for new follicles to grow in slightly different places.

How can you avoid buying a dog with distichiasis?

Ensure that the breeder takes any puppy you are considering purchasing to a veterinarian for a simple eye examination under the guidelines set out by an accredited canine eye scheme. As the condition is hereditary, you must also obtain copies of certification showing a clear examination under one of these schemes for the sire and dam of the puppy. Responsible breeders will generally have certification done on their breeding stock on an annual basis. Studies on the mode of inheritance for distichiasis are incomplete as yet, so certification of parents to be clear of the condition may therefore not be a foolproof method of determining whether a puppy will inherit it. However it will improve your chances of obtaining a puppy with healthy eyes, especially if you can look further back through the pedigree of the parents. Responsible breeders will generally not breed with dogs affected by distichiasis.

In USA, the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) can direct you towards members of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists for eye exams. In UK, the British Veterinary Association (BVA) conducts eye exams, and in Australia, contact the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) for examinations conducted under the Australian Canine Eye Scheme (ACES)