

## **DISTICHIASIS (DISTICHA)**

### **What is distichiasis?**

Distichiasis is a common condition that affects dogs, and less commonly, cats. The normal eyelid margin is devoid of hairs. There are multiple glands (called meibomian glands) along the eyelids which produce an oily secretion. Occasionally a hair can arise from or near these glands and project out of the eyelid. This hair is called a distichium, and the plural is distichia. These hairs may or may not come in contact with the cornea. This depends on whether they are thick/stiff or fine, and in which direction they are growing (they may be directed inwards).

### **What problems do they cause?**

Some distichia do not cause any problems. These are usually fine hairs, or hairs which are directed away from the cornea. Problems arise when the hairs rub on the cornea. It causes discomfort, and the animal may have a watery eye discharge and have excessive blinking. The hair can rub on the cornea and abrade it, causing a corneal ulcer. These corneal ulcers are very difficult to treat, as the hair continues to rub in the same area, preventing healing.

Distichia grow in young dogs, and if they are going to cause a problem, they usually do so in dogs of less than two years of age. However, occasionally they can become problematic in later life, particularly if the dog gets a condition called Dry Eye or keratoconjunctivitis sicca. In this condition, there is a deficiency in tears, making the eyes dry and more susceptible to the abrading effect of the distichia.

### **How is distichiasis diagnosed?**

Distichia may be seen with the naked eye with very close inspection. Usually, they are detected when a veterinary ophthalmologist uses equipment called a slit-lamp biomicroscope, which provides a very magnified view of the eyelids.





Crescent Veterinary Clinic,  
Dooradoyle Road,  
Limerick.

**Tel:** +353 (0)61 301841

**Fax:** +353 (0)61 307688

**Email:** [info@eyevet.ie](mailto:info@eyevet.ie)

**Web:** [www.eyevet.ie](http://www.eyevet.ie)

### **What is the treatment for distichiasis?**

Each case is managed individually. If the distichia do not appear to be causing any problems, they are usually left untreated. If they are rubbing on the surface of the cornea, a surgical procedure is usually recommended to remove them. It must be remembered that hairs have a continual cycle of falling out and re-growth. Therefore, not all hairs may be destroyed on the day of surgery as those which have recently fallen out won't be seen, and others may be dormant. For complete removal of all hairs, more than one procedure is usually required.

- Plucking will get rid of offending hairs, but unfortunately the relief provided will be temporary, as the hairs will grow back and may be thicker when they do so.
- A very effective method of permanently removing the hairs is using electrolysis. Under general anaesthesia and using an operating microscope, a very fine electrolysis may be inserted along the shaft of the hair. The electrical current is applied which burns the hair follicle, thus destroying it. There may be a small pink scar at these sites after surgery, but they usually improve greatly with time.
- Cryosurgery, or freezing, of the hair follicles, is sometimes done. This has a similar goal, of destroying the hair follicle and thus preventing re-growth. The eyelids are usually quite swollen after surgery, but this is a temporary effect.
- Surgical excision of the distichia may be carried out in certain circumstances, and sometimes a row of distichia is more effectively removed using this method.
- The eyelid may be rolled outwards in a procedure called a Hotz-Celsus, in order to reduce the contact between the hairs and the cornea.

### **What treatment is required after surgery?**

Your pet will be discharged with antibiotic ointment or drops. These will need to be administered as often as recommended.

Keep the eyes clean. Gently wipe away any discharge with clean water (for example, previously boiled water) on some cotton wool. This should be done before applying eye medication.

Where both drops and ointments are prescribed, the drop should be applied first. Wait at least five minutes before applying the ointment, as this acts as a greasy barrier which remains in the eye for longer.

Depending on whether additional procedures are done, sometimes your pet being fitted with a buster collar, to prevent access to the eye and reduce the likelihood of complications such as stitches breaking down. It is important that this collar is left on at all times, even at night.



Crescent Veterinary Clinic,  
Dooradoyle Road,  
Limerick.

**Tel:** +353 (0)61 301841

**Fax:** +353 (0)61 307688

**Email:** [info@eyevet.ie](mailto:info@eyevet.ie)

**Web:** [www.eyevet.ie](http://www.eyevet.ie)

Be observant. If there are any changes which you were not told to expect, please phone your vet or your veterinary ophthalmologist to discuss them.

Usually a re-examination appointment will be scheduled after surgery to check on your pet's progress.

Above all, do not forget to phone for advice if you feel that you need it.