

## Prolapsed Nictitans Glands – ‘Cherry Eye’

### What is Cherry Eye?

Prolapse of the nictitans gland, commonly called ‘cherry eye’ is a condition seen in puppies and young adults. The gland of the third eyelid, called the nictitans gland, is found anchored to the bottom of the third eyelid hidden from sight. In some breeds, the attachments are weak, and the gland pops out of position – it can be seen as a pink mass, cherry like indeed, in the inner corner of the eye.



Cherry eye

### What does the gland do?

The gland produces about 1/3 of the watery part of tears – thus it has a very important role in keeping the eye lubricated. Dry eye (keratoconjunctivitis sicca) can develop if the gland does not function properly.

### Is the condition painful?

The condition is not usually painful, although some irritation can occur, and secondary infections can also complicate things making the eye itchy and sore with a discharge.

### Does the condition affect both eyes?

Normally one eye develops the condition initially but it is very common for both eyes to be affected with the same underlying weakness and as such the second eye is at a high risk of developing the same cherry eye

### What are the treatment options?

Surgical repositioning of the gland is advised. There are 2 main techniques for this – one involves ‘pocketing’ the gland back into its position, the other involves anchoring it down to the bottom of the third eyelid. Both procedures require full general anaesthesia and are performed with magnification. The stitches used are very small and not visible when looking at the dog after surgery – they are internal. Normally they are dissolvable sutures so removal is not required.

### Is surgery always successful?

Surgery is successful in the vast majority of cases but in a few individuals it has to be repeated.

### Which breeds are affected?

The most common breeds which develop 'cherry eye' are those with flat faces – Bulldogs, Boxers, Shih Tsus, and so on but it is also seen in mastiff breeds like the Neapolitan mastiff, Dogue de Bordeaux and Great Dane. It can occur from time to time in any breed.

### The breeder of my puppy says I should have the gland cut out – what do you think?

Simply cutting out the gland ('plucking the cherry') is not recommended. The gland has a function – to produce 1/3 of the tear film. Its removal will take away this capacity. The breeds which are susceptible to developing dry eye (keratoconjunctivitis sicca) later in life tend to be similar breeds to those which develop cherry eye, so by removing the ability of the eye to produce 1/3 of its tears, the risk of severe dry eye developing later on is increased. Dry eye is a life long condition to treat and can be complicated and expensive to manage. Surgical repositioning of the prolapsed gland is thus advised to maintain a healthy eye for the long term rather than a 'quick fix' of removing it only to run into serious eye problems later in life.

### Is there any treatment after surgery?

Normally a short course of antibiotic eye drops and anti-inflammatory tablets are required after surgery. It can take 2 -4 weeks for the eye(s) to fully settle after the operation.