



OPHTHALMOLOGY REFERRALS

Miss Sally Turner | MA VetMB DVOphtal MRCVS | RCVS Specialist in Veterinary Ophthalmology

Enucleation (removal of the eye)

Why must the eye be removed?

It has been recommended that your pet has his/her eye removed. This procedure is called an enucleation. Clearly it is not something we undertake lightly and can be a very upsetting decision to have to make. However in some cases it is the only humane treatment option available. Reasons for having to remove an eye include painful, blinding conditions such as glaucoma (raised pressure in the eye) or severe infections (panophthalmitis) together with serious injuries and tumours.

What is involved with the surgery?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic. The area around the eye is shaved and the eyeball is removed together with the eyelids. The skin is sutured closed – it looks as though the eye has been sewn shut. Some bruising is inevitable and sometimes a slight blood-stained discharge can be present for 1 – 2 days after the operation. A combination of antibiotic and anti-inflammatory analgesic tablets are usually prescribed for a week or so. Obviously the operation site does not look very pleasant to start with but once the fur grows back the outcome is not unsightly. And of most importance is the fact that your pet will be much more comfortable and happy – indeed it is very common for owners to report that the pet has much more ‘bounce’ and is more playful afterwards – often the eye has been troubling them more than was realised.



Appearance just after surgery

Are there complications?

Complications following enucleation are very rare. Occasionally some discharge can occur for longer than expected, or a slight infection can develop. These are usually easy to treat. It is very unusual for any further surgery to be required.

Are there alternatives – what about false eyes?

In the USA it is common to do a procedure called an intrascleral prosthesis rather than an enucleation for some conditions in dogs (mainly just primary glaucoma). This procedure involves removing the contents of the eyeball and then inserting a silicone ball before sewing up the outer layer of the eye. It can result in a more cosmetic appearance than removing the whole eyeball (although the ‘eye’ never looks normal, and can still become ulcerated or painful if the dog knocks it for example). The procedure is performed purely for the owner – it confers no benefit to the patient whatsoever. As such in the UK, where our prime concern is the wellbeing of the animal, we tend not to recommend this type of cosmetic surgery. The dog or cat does not care what they look like anyway!

Is the other eye at risk?

It depends what condition the pet has – trauma or a tumour are very unlikely to have any repercussions in the fellow eye. The removed eye is often sent for pathological examination which can help to determine if there is any risk to the second eye. However if the pet has primary glaucoma then the other eye could be at risk, and so regular check ups with the Ophthalmologist might be advised. Also we recommend that if you have any concerns at all about the remaining eye you take your pet to the Vet sooner rather than later – partly for piece of mind, but also because early diagnosis of ocular problems tends to offer a much better prognosis.



10 days after surgery when sutures will be removed