

## ECTOPIC CILIA

### What are ectopic cilia?

An ectopic cilium (singular) is an individual hair which is growing on the inside of the eyelid. It bursts through the conjunctiva and then rubs inappropriately on the cornea. Occasionally, several hairs are present within the one follicle, even though only one may be visible. They are most common near the middle part of the upper eyelid, but can occur anywhere around the conjunctiva lining the eyelids.

### What causes ectopic cilia?

A hair or multiple hairs are growing in a site where they shouldn't, within the eyelid. If they burst through the conjunctiva, we can become aware that they are there.

### What are the signs of ectopic cilia?

The eye will be painful and there will be a watery discharge. The eyelids may spasm. The ectopic cilium may abrade the surface of the cornea, causing a small round hole called a corneal ulcer. This can attract our attention as to their presence. This corneal ulcer is unlikely to heal unless the hair is removed.



### How are ectopic cilia diagnosed?

Ectopic cilia may very occasionally 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. However, occasionally they are only found under general anaesthetic, when a more thorough search can be undertaken. There will be a suspicion of ectopic cilia when a round corneal ulcer happens towards the periphery of the cornea in a young dog, which will not heal despite eye drops or ointment.



Crescent Veterinary Clinic,  
Dooradoyle Road,  
Limerick.

**Tel:** +353 (0)61 301841  
**Fax:** +353 (0)61 307688  
**Email:** info@eyevet.ie  
**Web:** www.eyevet.ie

### **What is the treatment for ectopic cilia?**

- Plucking will get rid of offending hair, but unfortunately the relief provided will be temporary, as the hair will grow back and may be thicker when it does so. Also, there may actually be an island of hairs present rather than an individual hair.
- Electrolysis can be used to remove the hair. 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.
- 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 ectopic cilia is often required, as sometimes there is an island of hairs that are more effectively permanently removed using this method.

### **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.

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.