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ENUCLEATION (Removal of the eye)

Why does my pet need to have an eye removed?

There are many reasons why your vet or veterinary ophthalmologist may have advised you to have your pet's eye removed. Most often, it is to prevent potential long-standing pain and discomfort, or to try to prevent the spread of a tumour. The most common reasons are listed below.

Glaucoma:

This is a condition of the eye where the build-up of pressure of fluid inside the eye is causing severe pain and blindness. While eye drops (made for humans) can be used to reduce the pressure, they do not work at all in some cases, and stop working after a while in some other cases.

Neoplasia:

This means a tumour (cancer) of the eye. This may be malignant, and removal of the eye may be a way of trying to reduce spread of the tumour. Even benign tumours inside the eye can cause problems such as glaucoma. However, not every tumour needs to result in removal of the eye; therefore your pet's case will be assessed individually. In some cases, removal of the eye and submitting it for laboratory analysis is the only way of determining if a suspicious change within the eye is a tumour or not, and if so, what further treatment may be required.

Severe trauma:

Injury to the eye may be so severe as to be irreparable. An example would be where a sharp penetration from a cat's claw or thorn ruptures the lens inside the eye. While surgery can be attempted in the immediate period afterwards, delay to treatment or severity of the injury may make repair impossible.

Abscess within the eye:

Infections within the eye can be refractory to treatment and removal of the eye may be the only alternative if medications fail.

How is the surgery carried out?

A general anaesthetic is needed. The hair around the eye is clipped. The eyeball is removed completely, along with the muscles and conjunctiva which surround the eye. The edges of the eyelids are removed, and they are then stitched together.

What happens to the eye?

Unless you have objections, the eye is usually submitted to a laboratory for analysis. There are many reasons for this. It is important to discover if there is any tumour or infection within the eye which would potentially cause serious health problems to your

pet. Also, if a cause of the disease could be found, preventative medicine may be appropriate for the other eye, allowing this eye to be spared. The laboratory charges a fee, which will be passed on to you.

What will my pet look like afterwards?

The area around the eye will be shaved, but the hair tends to grow back in one to two months. Initially some swelling is expected, as many blood vessels are affected by the operation. The surgical wound may weep slightly and occasionally some blood is seen at the nostril. This is because the blood travels down the tear duct to the nostril. This should not cause alarm unless blood is persistent or flowing. The animal is usually comfortable after 24 hours. After several days, the swelling disappears and there is a depression in the area where the skin sinks in. This is barely noticeable in animals with long hair.



Ben has no eyes and is very happy!



Baby copes well with one eye

What aftercare is involved?

Medication (antibiotic and anti-inflammatory pain-relieving tablets) is usually dispensed and these should be given as instructed. If slight bleeding occurs, the area should be gently bathed with damp cotton wool. The animal should be kept relatively quiet for one week. Usually the stitches are dissolvable and healing will be complete in ten days. However, your vet will inform you if there are stitches which need to be removed. Your pet will normally be fitted with a buster collar to prevent him/her from traumatizing the wound and ripping out the stitches. This should be worn at all times. You may move it at your discretion if the animal is not rubbing at the eye at all, but he/she should be supervised at all times. A recheck appointment will be required.



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It is important that you would contact your vet or your veterinary ophthalmologist if you have concerns, they are always on hand to give advice, or to see your animal if necessary.

Are there any alternatives?

There are two slightly differences which may be performed in certain cases, if it is appropriate to your animal. A silicone prosthesis in the shape of a ball may be inserted into the orbit and the eyelids stitched over this. This means that the depression in the eye area will not occur after surgery, and it looks more like the animal has the eye shut. The silicone prosthesis may also be inserted inside the eye itself. However this is only appropriate for certain cases and this will need to be discussed before taking this option.



This dog had an intraocular prosthesis in his left eye four years previously. The eye appears white.

How will my pet cope with one eye?

Domestic animals lead a normal life with one normal eye. Only a small area loses vision. Your pet is unlikely to notice that one eye has been removed, and should in fact feel much better for not having the painful eye. Many owners notice retrospectively after the eye is removed that the pet is much happier since the operation.