Eye diseases in cats.

It is normally quite straightforward to recognise that there is something wrong with your pet's eyes. In most diseases that affect the eye the eye will look sore or there will be excessive discharge.

If your pet has a reddened or runny eye, is blinking a lot or pawing at its face then an early trip to the vet is advisable. Cats that have suffered from cat flu as kittens may be left with permanently runny eyes and some infectious diseases can also cause conjunctivitis in cats.

Eye problems can be caused by a foreign body in the eye – often a grass seed or piece of dirt; a scratch on the eye caused by another cat's claw or running into a twig, or a simple eye infection.

To work out what is wrong with the eye your vet will need to examine it carefully. Any foreign material in the eye can be removed and it is likely that your pet will need some eye drops or cream for a few days afterwards.

Blindness is not commonly recognised in pets and if your pet is only blind in one eye they may compensate well and show no signs. However if an animal has gone suddenly blind in both eyes this will be easy to recognise as they will be bumping into obstacles and may appear disorientated or frightened and be unwilling to move. Animals in which blindness has developed more slowly may adapt much better and often vision can be very poor without owners realising there is anything wrong with their pets.

What causes cataracts in cats?
Cataracts most commonly develop in cats after severe inflammation in the eye, or as a result of poisonings or nutritional imbalances. Some cats are born with cataracts or develop them soon after birth and they may develop due to nutritional abnormalities, or trauma. Diabetes mellitus is a common cause of cataract in dogs but it rarely causes cataract in cats. Lens opacification increases with age and almost all older cats will be affected to some degree although this may not affect their lifestyle at all.
How will I know if my cat has cataracts?

Usually owners are alerted to the fact that their pet may have a problem when they notice a whiteness of the eye. If eye disease develops gradually animals are often able to adapt well and use their other senses to help them get around. Cats have very good hearing and a sense of smell and can use these to compensate for poor vision to some extent. In familiar surroundings it may be almost impossible to tell that a pet cannot see. If you are worried about your pet's vision you can test it yourself using some simple exercises:

1. Observe your cat carefully in the home environment and out of doors - does he appear to be having any visual difficulty?
2. Throw light, silent objects (e.g. a ball of cotton wool) in front of his eyes - does he see and follow these?
3. Construct a small obstacle course in the home, or move furniture around and away from the usual positions - does he see and avoid these obstacles the first time?

Repeat the above tests in daylight and in subdued lighting.

If you are concerned about the results of the report them to your vet and ask for a check-up for your pet. Diagnosis is usually straightforward, and based upon visual testing and examination of the eye by a vet/ophthalmologist. Additional tests may be required to check for other causes and other eye diseases.

What is conjunctivitis?

The conjunctiva is the pinkish surface surrounding the eyeball. The third eyelid is an extra protective eyelid in the cat and is also covered by conjunctiva. In normal cats the conjunctiva is not readily visible. In conjunctivitis this membrane is inflamed and becomes red and swollen. Conjunctivitis can affect one or both eyes.

What are the signs of conjunctivitis?

Cats with conjunctivitis usually have a discharge from their eye(s). This can be clear and watery or thick and green/yellow in colour. The conjunctiva is often more visible and may be swollen, partially covering the eye. The eye(s) may be held half closed and the third eyelid is more prominent.

What are the causes of conjunctivitis?

A number of different conditions will cause conjunctivitis. Many are sudden in onset and easily treatable. Others cause a long term disease which can be more difficult to control.
1. Irritants, trauma (e.g. cat fights) and foreign bodies can cause conjunctivitis. In most cases treatment is rapidly effective once the cause has been removed.

2. The most common causes of conjunctivitis in cats are infectious agents. These can be viruses (usually one of the cat flu viruses), bacteria and a group of organisms which resemble bacteria (most commonly Chlamydia).

3. Disease of the immune system can also cause conjunctivitis. These diseases are rare in cats but can be difficult to treat.

**How will my vet know if my cat has conjunctivitis?**

Usually your vet will be able to tell that your cat has conjunctivitis by a simple examination. They will want to examine the eye closely to ensure there is no damage nor foreign body. If there is no obvious traumatic cause most cases will respond to drops or ointment containing antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs. If a foreign body is present then this obviously needs to be removed.

If the signs are not getting better with a few days treatment, or appears to improve only to get worse again when treatment stops, more investigation is required. Your vet will want to take a swab from the conjunctiva to look for infection. In some cases a blood sample may also be required. If there is no infection then it can be helpful to look at a sample of cells from the conjunctiva. This sample is obtained by gently scraping the surface of the conjunctiva with a cotton wool swab or spatula. If a larger sample is required, then a section of conjunctiva taken surgically may be necessary.

**Can conjunctivitis be treated?**

In most cases conjunctivitis is treated by application of drops or ointments to the eye. Sometimes, with particularly stubborn infections, antibiotic treatment may also need to be given by injection or tablet.

**Can I manage my cat’s treatment at home?**

If you are able to treat your cat’s eyes this can be done at home but regular treatment is essential. Most drops or ointments need to be administered at least 3–6 times a day. Two people are usually required to give drops to a cat, one to hold them still and the other to give the treatment. If you have any doubts as to how to give the medication prescribed, please ask your veterinary practice to give a demonstration. If you are unable to treat your cat appropriately your vet may arrange to keep it in the hospital for a few days to ensure that effective treatment is given.
How to give eye drops to your cat and how often.

Eye problems in cats are quite common. Tears quickly wash out any treatment put in the eye so eye drops need to be given several times a day. This means you will have to learn how to give the treatment at home.

Some drops only need to be given once a day, others up to six times daily. Always follow the instructions given to you by your vet very carefully. Never give more than the recommended dose and, if at all possible, try not to miss treatments.

How do I hold my cat?

You will find it easier to hold your cat at a comfortable working height. Try placing your cat on a table or raised surface. If the surface is slippery, put a carpet tile or towel down so that your cat feels more secure. If your cat struggles a lot, you may need to wrap your cat in a towel or blanket to prevent them scratching you. You will need to get a friend to help you – one of you will hold the cat whilst the other steadies the head and puts the drops into the eye.

How do I apply drops?

The person holding the cat should grip the cat's head firmly under the chin and tilt the head upwards. The other person holds the dropper bottle in one hand and opens the cat's eye using the thumb and forefinger of the other hand. Position the dropper bottle a few centimetres above the eye and squeeze gently to release the right number of drops. Avoid touching the eye with the bottle spout.

How do I apply ointments/creams?

Ointments and creams are slightly more difficult to apply because they are thick like toothpaste. Hold the cat and open its eye as above. Holding the tube of ointment above the eye, squeeze out some ointment and let it drop onto the eye to lie between the lids. Detach this 'worm' of ointment from the tube by pulling the ointment down against the lower lid. Always avoid touching the eye with the nozzle.

Does it matter where on the eye the drops/ointment falls?

As long as the treatment falls on the eye somewhere it does not matter where. When your cat blinks the drug will spread all over the surface of the eye.

Does the treatment hurt?

The eye is one of the most sensitive parts of the body and putting anything into an eye may cause discomfort. However, eye drops and ointments are designed for use in the eye and any
discomfort will be slight. Your cat may blink a lot or have a 'watery eye' for a few moments after you have put the drops in. On rare occasions your cat may paw at the eye(s), rub its face along the floor or the 'white' of the eye becomes red and sore. If so, stop the treatment immediately and contact your vet.

How long do I have to continue the treatment?
Always continue the treatment for as long as your vet recommends. Eye problems often appear to get better very quickly once treatment starts but if you stop treatment too soon the problem may come back.

What if I really can't give the drops myself?
Most owners get quite good at giving eye drops with a bit of practice, but if you really can't do it yourself tell your vet. He may be able to prescribe a different drug which does not need to be given so often or which can be given by mouth instead. In some cases a nurse may be able to help you, or your cat could be taken into the hospital for a few days to be given treatment.

Lanes Vets Locations & Contact Information.

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<tr>
<th>Green Lane Veterinary Centre</th>
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