

Dry Eye (or Keratoconjunctivitis (KCS))

Dry eye is a common condition in dogs. It usually occurs as a consequence of insufficient tear production. Tears are essential for maintaining the health and clarity of the cornea (the clear window at the front of the eye). Tears provide lubrication, allowing smooth movement of the eyelids during blinking. In addition they provide nutrition, aiding the passage of oxygen into the cornea, and protection via the production of antibodies.



The clinical signs of KCS

The early clinical signs of KCS are commonly an increased frequency of blinking, reddening of the conjunctiva (conjunctivitis) and a lack lustre appearance of the cornea. With progression, the eyes are more obviously uncomfortable. There is often a tenacious mucky discharge, clouding and pigmentation of the cornea. Without treatment, the end result is blindness.

The diagnosis of KCS

KCS can be diagnosed easily and quickly by performing a Schirmer tear test. A special strip of filter paper is tucked inside the lower eyelid and the flow of tears recorded after one minute.

In a recent survey, approximately 1 in 20 normal dogs had KCS. The incidence in KCS - susceptible breeds was almost 1 in 10 - these are:

- West Highland White Terrier
- Cocker Spaniels
- Lhasa Apso
- Shih Tsu
- English Bulldog

The treatment of KCS

The most common cause of KCS is destruction of the tear-producing lacrimal glands by the body's own immune system. The only medication to directly treat this underlying cause is an immunomodulating drug. A small bleb is applied to each eye twice daily. Response to treatment is not immediate, so a lubricating gel may be required in addition until tear production improves. The best response is achieved when treatment is begun early. Once further lacrimal glandular tissue is destroyed, this significantly reduces the chance of full restoration of tear production.