

Cataracts and Cataract Surgery

Frequently Asked Questions

A cataract is a condition where there is an opacity or “clouding” of the eye lens. Cataracts impair vision by preventing light from focusing properly on the retina, resulting in poor vision or blindness. Cataracts can affect dogs of all ages. More susceptible breeds include Poodles, Bichon Frise, Retrievers, Terriers, and Cocker Spaniels. Cataracts can be an inherited trait, age-related, or from conditions such as diabetes. Intraocular inflammation, trauma, or exposure to certain chemicals can also lead to cataract formation.

How do we evaluate and treat cataract conditions?

Cataracts are diagnosed by completing a thorough eye exam on your pet. A series of diagnostic tests will be performed, which include: tear production measurement, measuring the intraocular pressure (IOP) of the eye, and staining to evaluate the ocular surface. This information will determine the level of visual impairment, the likelihood of cataract progression, and the next course of action recommended by the ophthalmologist, be it monitoring or surgery.

Do all cataracts require surgery?

Not necessarily. Some cataracts are so small they are visually insignificant to your pet and may only require monitoring.

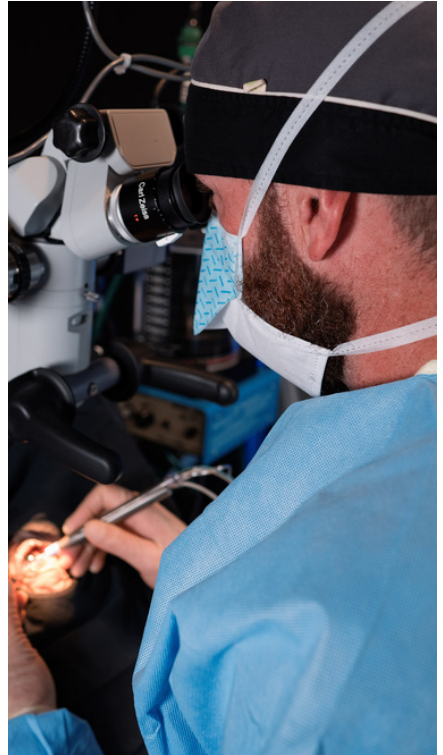
Are there complications to consider in cataract surgery?

Complications directly related to the surgery, although very uncommon, include anesthetic death, hemorrhage, infection, and reopening of a surgical incision. Long-term risks of having had a cataract include glaucoma, inflammation, and retinal detachment. The ophthalmologist will discuss any short and long-term complications with you before and after the surgery. Follow-up appointments and use of medications, as recommended, are extremely important to help minimize risks of complications and maintain sight.

What happens if my pet does not have cataract surgery?

If your pet does not have cataract surgery, for whatever reason, the cataract will remain, and the lens will continue to leak lens proteins into the eye. These proteins cause inflammation within the eye, and predispose your pet to a lens luxation, retinal detachment and/or glaucoma. A retinal detachment is not painful to your pet. However, lens luxation, inflammation, and glaucoma are painful and warrant medications or surgery to alleviate their discomfort and preserve vision.

If your pet does not have cataract surgery, we recommend a complete ocular examination with intraocular pressure evaluation be performed every 3-6 months to prolong comfort for your pet. The ophthalmologist may recommend eye drops to try to prevent the secondary complications of cataracts.



Ophthalmologist John R. Warren, DVM, DACVO®, performing cataract surgery.

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How is Cataract Surgery Performed?

If our doctors determine that your pet's eye is a good candidate for surgery, they will perform a procedure called phacoemulsification.

Once your pet is prepped for surgery (we may shave their face to help prevent infection) and under general anesthesia, a small incision is made into the eye. An ultrasonic hand piece (similar in size to a large ink pen) is used to break up the cataract and aspirate it out of the eye. Then an artificial lens is inserted to restore your pet's normal refraction. After the cataract is removed, an artificial lens is implanted to allow light to focus properly on the retina, offering the patient corrected vision.

It is common for both eyes to be affected by cataracts, but not necessarily at the same time. When both eyes are affected, cataract surgery is often performed in both eyes at the same time.

What is the success rate of cataract surgery?

This surgery is approximately 95% successful however, the results can be variable based on individual patient's initial findings. If the cataract is advanced, the surgical success rate could be lower. Your pet's situation will be discussed with you in detail once the ophthalmologist has performed an evaluation.

With a successful surgery, most patients quickly regain near normal vision but are slightly far-sighted. This means their vision is slightly out of focus when viewing objects at a close distance (within a few feet).

Will my pet develop cataracts again after surgery?

After removal of the cataracts, your pet will not develop cataracts again.

What is Pre-Operative Retinal Testing?

Pre-operative retinal testing is used to confirm your pet has a healthy retina prior to cataract surgery. The retina is a tissue paper-like membrane in the back of the eye that allows for vision, analogous to the film in a camera. If the retina is not functioning properly, removing the cataract and implanting an artificial lens will not improve your pet's vision.

We perform two tests to evaluate retinal function prior to cataract surgery; an electroretinogram (ERG) and an ocular ultrasound (US). The ERG tests the electrical activity or function of the retina. The ocular US allows us to evaluate the structure of the eye by giving us visualization of the posterior segment.

The ERG requires that we "dark adapt" your pet's eyes. We will place them in a dark exam room for 20-30 minutes prior to performing the test. These tests are not painful and can be performed on most pets without sedation.

Is there anything I should do to prepare for my pet's surgery?

Please have your pet bathed and groomed prior to surgery, as bathing and grooming are not recommended for one-month post-surgery. We also recommend purchasing a step-in harness as leashes or collars around the neck can increase pressure in the eye. This increased pressure can have undesirable consequences, including bleeding inside the eye.

Will my pet be able to come home following surgery?

Yes, your pet will be able to return home following their procedure. Cataract surgery is an outpatient procedure and does not require hospitalization.



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Ophthalmologist John R. Warren, DVM, DACVO®, performing ocular exam.

What post-operative care will my pet need?

Following your pet's surgery, we will provide a personalized home care plan. This is vital to a successful outcome and will include administering eye drops and giving oral medications. Additionally, an Elizabethan collar will be fitted specifically to your pet and required during the healing phase.

The first post-op appointment will be required the morning after your pet's surgery. We then recheck at one week, two weeks, 1 month, and 2 months after surgery. Periodic follow up examinations are then scheduled on a 6 month to a yearly basis to ensure your pet remains pain-free and visual for life.

When will my pet regain their vision?

Most pets experience improved vision immediately and vision typically continues to improve over the 3 to 7 days following surgery.

What does it mean to be specialized in veterinary ophthalmology?

An ophthalmologist specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of conditions involving the eyes and associated structures. The veterinary ophthalmologists at VEI have dedicated their practice to protecting and preserving sight in all animal species, including dogs, cats, horses, birds, exotics, and zoo animals.

Highly specialized equipment, identical to that used by your own ophthalmologist, is used by veterinary ophthalmologists for examination and treatment of your pet. Our operating rooms are also equally equipped to handle the very specific needs of eye surgery, including operating microscopes and microsurgical instrumentation and equipment.

A Board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist is a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists® (ACVO®).

To become a Diplomate, ACVO® requires completion of a one-year internship and a three-year ophthalmology residency after graduation from veterinary school. These residencies are very rigorous and highly competitive. After successful completion of the residency, the veterinarian may be eligible to sit for the board examinations. If the candidate passes all four parts of the examination, they become a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists®.

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