



Distichia

What are distichia?

Distichia are abnormally placed eyelashes that occur commonly in dogs and rarely in cats. Distichia arise from the eyelid margin, instead of its edge, and are directed toward the ocular surface. When numerous or particularly stout, such hairs can contribute to ocular surface irritation and disease.

What are the signs of distichia?

Distichia can cause redness of the eye, increased eye discharge, and signs of ocular discomfort, such as squinting or rubbing at the eye. In some animals, distichia can also cause recurrent or non-healing corneal ulcerations (abrasions on the surface of the eye). Although rare, in severe cases distichia can result in permanent scarring of the cornea over time.

What is the recommended treatment?

When distichia are associated with clinical signs, the recommended treatment is cryotherapy. This procedure involves freezing the hair follicles to prevent continued growth of these hairs. For patients that are only mildly affected (no ocular discomfort but increased redness of the eye or mild eye discharge), occasional application of a lubricating ophthalmic ointment may be helpful to reduce irritation from the hairs, and may avoid the need for surgery. Fortunately, though, many dogs and cats with distichia are asymptomatic, and for these patients no treatment is necessary.

Prognosis:

Following cryotherapy for treatment of distichia, the eyelids often become temporarily swollen and red, and sometimes the eyelid skin becomes depigmented. Rarely, this depigmentation is permanent, which is not clinically significant but can alter the appearance of your pet. There is some risk for re-growth of distichia following cryotherapy, but typically the numbers of these hairs is reduced enough from the procedure that the clinical signs will not return. In rare cases, cryotherapy must be repeated.