

# CATARACT

## What is the lens?

The lens is a transparent crystalline structure within the eye that is responsible for focussing light onto the retina. The lens is contained by a very thin bag called the lens capsule and is suspended within the eye by zonule fibres.

## What is a cataract?

A cataract is any opacification of the lens or the lens capsule that prevents the passage of light.

## Are all cataracts the same?

No, cataracts vary greatly in appearance. We will normally classify the type of cataract by:

- Age of onset
- Stage of development
- Position within the lens
- Relation to potential underlying factors.

## How do we determine if your pet has a cataract?

We can look into your pet's eye with specialised equipment so that we can determine the transparency of the lens. We will commonly use a high definition ocular ultrasound scanner to provide further information. These tests are not painful and are routinely performed without any sedation.

## Do cataracts only develop in old dogs?

No, this is a common misconception and a large number of our patients are young or middle-aged. Old-age (senile) cataracts do occur in dogs, and may be detected in conjunction with nuclear sclerosis (hardening of the central part of the lens).

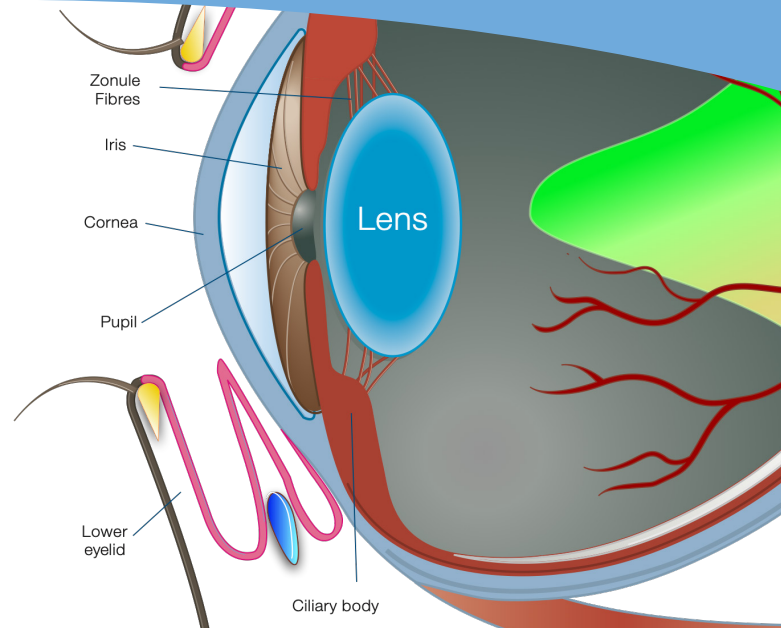
## What causes a cataract to form?

The condition can be caused by genetic factors in certain breeds (hereditary) or by a number of other diseases which results in cataract formation (secondary). The most common causes of secondary cataracts are:

- Diabetes
- Uveitis (inflammation within the eye)
- Trauma
- Generalised progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)

## What are the presenting signs of a cataract?

It may not be possible to determine a behavioural change in a dog with a small cataract, but if the opacity grows vision from that eye will be compromised. It is not uncommon for dogs to lose all vision with cataract development, especially in conjunction with other diseases such as Diabetes.



## Is my dog at risk?

There are many breeds that are suspected to have inherited cataracts. The type of cataract will vary in shape, size and age of onset. Inherited cataracts do not have to be present at birth (congenital) and the puppy's parents may appear to be unaffected. We recommend that all breeding dogs in the UK should undergo a BVA/KC eye test with a panel ophthalmologist. For some breeds there are genetic (DNA) tests available.

More information about hereditary ocular diseases can be found on the BVA website:

[www.bva.co.uk/canine-health-schemes/eye-scheme/](http://www.bva.co.uk/canine-health-schemes/eye-scheme/)

## How quickly will the cataract grow?

Cataracts will vary considerably in their rate of progression. If rapid cataract development does occur, the lens capsule may not be capable of containing it, and more urgent treatment could be required.

## How do we treat cataracts?

Unfortunately, there are currently no eye drops or medications on the market that have been proven to effectively remove cataracts. As with human cataract development, the only way we can restore vision is with cataract surgery (see Cataract Surgery Factsheet). However, not all cases require surgery and it may be possible to prevent rapid progression, depending on the underlying cause. Early assessment gives us the best possible chance of preserving vision in the long-term.