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Glaucoma

What is Glaucoma?

Glaucoma is a disease in which the pressure in the eye increases to painful and potentially blinding levels. Normally, pressure in the eye is maintained by a balance between constant fluid production inside the eye and constant drainage of fluid from the eye. When patients develop glaucoma, the outflow system has become altered or impaired, resulting in a build-up of pressure and damage to the eye and vision. Different breeds and species experience different types and severities of glaucoma.

What causes Glaucoma?

The most common cause of glaucoma is an inherited, genetic, or breed predisposed, abnormality in the outflow system, also known as the drainage angle. Other causes of glaucoma include inflammation or infection in the eye, blood in the eye, trauma, tumors, or certain lens disorders.

What are the common clinical signs?

In most veterinary patients, glaucoma is aggressive, and there are few to no early warning signs noted. Patients present with a severely painful cloudy eye, and the eye is often blind due to the markedly elevated pressure. As the condition becomes more chronic, the eye progressively enlarges, and vision loss is permanent.

What is the treatment?

Treatment of acute glaucoma includes aggressive eye drops to control pressure by decreasing fluid production and increasing fluid drainage. Many patients also undergo laser surgery to further decrease fluid production, and shunt placement to improve fluid drainage. Patients that regain vision will continue receiving medications long term, and intermittent rechecks will be recommended to monitor control of the condition. Unfortunately, many patients do not regain vision in the affected eye, despite aggressive medications and surgery. If patients do not regain vision or if the intraocular pressure cannot be well controlled, a salvage procedure to eliminate discomfort may be recommended.

In patients with primary glaucoma in which the disease is thought to be inherited or genetic, the other eye is at risk. Medication will be used in an effort to prevent or delay the onset of glaucoma in that eye. The pet should be monitored carefully for any evidence of change in appearance, abnormalities with vision, or discomfort associated with that eye, and should be re-evaluated promptly if any problems develop.