

*Mountain View Animal Hospital*  
129 Main Street, Essex Junction, VT 05452  
(802)-879-6311  
[www.vtvvet.com](http://www.vtvvet.com)

## Corneal Ulcers

### THE CORNEAL ULCER

There are several causes of an acutely red and painful eye and one of the most common is a wound or scrape to the surface of the eye – called an ulcer. The clear surface of the eye is called the cornea, and because it is the outermost layer of the eye it is prone to scrapes and tears. Common causes of corneal ulcers include: scratches from another animal, rough contact with plants or bushes, self trauma (rubbing or scratching at a painful ear or eye can lead to an inadvertent scratch), chemical irritation, foreign body injury.

### DIAGNOSIS

Your veterinarian will apply a green colored fluorescent stain to the affected eye and then look at it with a special blue light in order to confirm the presence of an ulcer. Normally, water will run smoothly off the surface of the cornea. If the cornea is damaged, the green stain will stick to the damaged area and show bright green under a fluorescent lamp.

### TREATMENT

A routine corneal ulcer should heal easily. Since the damaged cornea is at risk to become infected (or may already be infected), a topical *triple antibiotic ointment* is needed and ideally should be used at least 4 times a day. Since it is a rare pet owner that can accommodate giving medication 4 times a day, we usually make do with 3 times a day (but do it as often as you can!).

The second part of treatment is a pain reliever: *Atropine ointment*. The main source of pain when an animal has an ulcer is muscle spasm associated with the pupil. Atropine relieves pain by temporarily paralyzing this muscle. You can expect the eye to look dilated when using this medication. Because the tear duct is connected to the nose and mouth, the patient may taste the above medications. Atropine is famous for its bitter taste – while dogs do not ever seem to mind it, cats will usually drool shortly after the medication is given in an effort to get the taste out of their mouth. This is a normal reaction, as is the dilated pupil.

Depending on the animal, we may send you home with an Elizabethan collar (a lamp-shade collar). This may be needed to prevent self-trauma to the eye if it is particularly painful or irritating to your pet. It is very important to have your pet wear this collar as directed until the ulcer is healed. Be sure to request one if your pet has been rubbing at their eye(s) at all.

### HOME CARE

Give all medications as often as directed and consistently until the ulcer is healed. It is very important to return to your veterinarian after 5-7 days of therapy and have the eye stained again. Most ulcers will have completely healed in this time, but some will require an additional week of treatment. If the ulcer has not healed after two weeks, it is no longer considered an uncomplicated ulcer and some special procedures may be needed and/or a veterinary ophthalmologist may be required. If the inflammation associated with the ulcer goes deeper into the eye, the situation becomes much more serious; ***It is very important that the one week recheck not be skipped – more serious conditions with the eye can develop if not monitored.*** Observe the eye carefully during your week of treatment. If the eye is doing well but suddenly becomes more painful, if a discharge develops, or if the eye simply does not look right – have your veterinarian recheck your pet sooner than the regularly scheduled recheck.