

HYPERTENSIVE RETINOPATHY

Hypertensive Retinopathy is a condition wherein high systemic blood pressure (hypertension) causes secondary retinal detachments, and/or retinal and intraocular hemorrhages. The problem tends to occur most frequently in elderly cats, and results in sudden blindness.

The retina is the nervous layer of the eye, and it normally lies flat against the back of the eye. It is responsible for collecting light impulses, which are then transferred to the brain and interpreted as vision. When the retina detaches from its normal position, it ceases to function and the patient becomes blind. Although immediate reattachment of the retina can sometimes restore vision, a cat's retina degenerates quickly (hours to days) so in many cases, by the time the diagnosis is made, the prognosis for vision is poor. Additionally, retinal hemorrhages (bleeding) are an indication that the retina has been damaged and reattachment may be delayed.

Since the hypertension caused the retinas to detach, treatment and control of the hypertension helps to reattach the retinas. Unlike humans, high blood pressure in cats and dogs is not caused by poor diet. Instead, hypertension in animals is usually secondary to another problem such as kidney disease, heart disease, Cushing's disease or thyroid disease. Treatment for Hypertensive Retinopathy usually involves an investigation into the possible underlying diseases responsible for the hypertension. Management of the disease by your regular veterinarian should help control the hypertension.