

INDOLENT CORNEAL ULCER

The clear surface layer of the eye is called the cornea. The normal cornea is covered by a protective layer of tissue called the epithelium, sort of like a “skin” over the deeper layers. Damaged epithelium results in an unprotected wound on the surface of the eye. This painful condition is known as corneal ulceration. If left untreated, corneal ulcers can become infected and involve deeper layers of the cornea. Clinical signs of a corneal ulcer include squinting, tearing, redness, and cloudiness. A special green stain is used during the ophthalmic examination to highlight the ulcer.

There are many different types of corneal ulcers. Treatment of the ulcer depends on its type and depth. Your pet has been diagnosed with an indolent ulcer. In contrast to deep ulcers that can lead to perforation of the eye, indolent ulcers are superficial. These chronic ulcers are called “indolent” because they are slow to heal and can take several months to heal without aggressive treatment.

Although indolent ulcers usually are NOT the result of traumatic injury to the eye, we don’t really know what causes them. We do know that indolent ulcers occur most frequently in older patients, and in certain breeds of dog such as the Boxer, Corgi, Labrador Retriever and Golden Retriever. Some Persian and Himalayan cats also have chronic superficial ulcers.

Indolent ulcers take a long time to heal because as the corneal epithelium regenerates over the exposed wound, the new tissue fails to adhere properly to the cornea below. While the presence of this loose epithelium can relieve discomfort temporarily, eventually the abnormal tissue will erode and the wound once again is exposed.

There are a few different ways to treat indolent ulcers. Fortunately, the majority of treatments available do not require general anesthesia. The ulcer is often debrided to remove any dead epithelial tissue. Another technique, which stimulates healing, is a minor surgical procedure called multiple punctate keratotomy (MPK). A temporary collagen shield may be placed on the cornea to alleviate discomfort, protect the eye, and promote healing. Antibiotics are usually dispensed to prevent infections. Depending on the specifics of the patient and the ulcer’s location, one or more of the above techniques can help shorten the healing time of an indolent ulcer from MONTHS to days or weeks.

You should observe your pet daily for comfort level, type of discharge from the eye, and redness. Healing ulcers should exhibit the presence of red blood vessels -this is a GOOD sign! Please call if you have any questions.