

PANNUS

What is pannus?

Pannus is a nonpainful, autoimmune disease of the cornea and conjunctiva of both eyes. Affected dogs suffer from a misdirected immune response to their own cornea that manifests itself as blood vessels, pigmentation, and scar tissue in the cornea. With time, the normally clear corneas opacify, and some dogs eventually go blind. Pannus can also cause thickening and depigmentation of the third eyelids (plasmoma). Plasmoma can occur alone or in conjunction with pannus of the cornea.

Are certain breeds more likely to develop pannus?

Yes. Approximately 90% of dogs with pannus are German Shepherds. Other affected breeds include Belgian Turvurens, Siberian Huskies, Border Collies, and greyhounds, although other breeds may be affected.

How is pannus treated?

The corneas will clear significantly after 1-2 months of diligent eye drop application. Some dogs respond best to corticosteroid eye drops, while others respond best to cyclosporine eye drops or ointment. More severe cases require treatment with both types of medications. Additionally, your dog may require a corticosteroid injection around the eye to augment the topical eye medication treatments.

Can pannus be cured?

Unfortunately no. For this reason, the key to the long-term preservation of vision is faithful, uninterrupted medication of the eyes and regular evaluations by a veterinarian.

Are surgeries available to help my dog?

If the topical eye treatments fail in spite of our best efforts, your dog may benefit from a local application of beta-radiation with or without surgical excision of the corneal scar tissue. With your dog under general anesthesia, a radioactive probe is placed upon the cornea, and a specified dose is delivered. The remainder of the eye and body are unaffected due to the poor penetration of the low energy beta particles. Beta-radiation will not cure pannus, but in most cases will augment your efforts with the eye medications. Beta-radiation slightly injures the normal cornea. Thus, a dog may withstand 2-3 applications over a lifetime. For this reason, beta-radiation is reserved for the dog that fails to respond to maximal medical treatment.

The most important factor in preserving your dog's vision is diligent, uninterrupted topical eye treatments.