



Distichiasis ('extra eyelashes') Fact Sheet

Distichiasis is a common condition in dogs. It occurs when eyelashes are abnormally positioned and emerge too close to the eyelid margin.

Distichiasis can occur in any breed of dog but is most commonly seen in the American Cocker and Cocker Spaniel, Miniature and Longhaired Dachshund, Bulldog and Weimeraner breeds.

What are the signs of distichiasis?

In many dogs the extra eyelashes do not cause a problem, but in some cases they can rub the surface of the eye and cause irritation. The most common signs that you will notice are increased blinking/squinting of the eye, increased watering, and redness of the 'white' of the eye.

What are the treatment options for distichiasis?

Distichiasis only requires treatment if the hairs are causing irritation, conjunctivitis or corneal ulceration. There are a number of treatment options:

1. Ocular lubricants.

In mild cases of distichiasis, daily use of a lubricating gel such as Viscotears, Geltears or Lacrilube may be sufficient to soften the hairs and reduce their irritation. Lifelong treatment will be required.

2.Plucking.

Sometimes the extra eyelashes can be plucked using special epilation forceps. This is particularly useful when there are only a few long hairs present. However, because the hairs will grow back after a few weeks, regular and lifelong treatment will be needed.

3.Electrolysis.

Under general anaesthesia, a fine electrode is inserted into each hair follicle and a current is applied to permanently destroy the hair follicle. Once the hair follicle is destroyed the distichia cannot regrow. However, because only those hairs that happen to be present at the time of treatment can be identified and removed, new hairs may emerge at a later date and also cause irritation. The success rate of electrolysis per treatment is around 70-80%. The procedure can be repeated a number of times if necessary. Rarely, electrolysis can cause some scarring and depigmentation of the eyelids, but this is not usually severe.

4.Cryotherapy.

This technique may be useful when many hairs are present. Under general anaesthesia, a probe is applied to the inner surface of the eyelid in the region of the hair follicles. Via this probe, the eyelid is frozen to destroy the hair follicles. The technique can cause some scarring and depigmentation of the eyelids. This procedure may also need to be repeated, and has a similar success rate to electrolysis.