

Cherry Eye



What is a 'cherry eye'?

A cherry eye refers to a prolapsed third eyelid gland. Normally, the third eyelid gland is hidden behind the 'third eyelid' - which is a thin conjunctival membrane that functions as a wind-screen wiper for your dog's eye. As the gland prolapses from underneath the third eyelid, it becomes enlarged and with its bright pink colour it resembles a cherry - therefore the name 'cherry eye'!



The same patient as above immediately after surgery to replace the prolapsed gland. There is only mild swelling and redness of the operated eye visible and the patient is comfortable.

What function has the third eyelid gland?

The third eyelid gland produces approximately a third of your dog's tears. Tears are extremely important to keep the eye healthy.

Is excision of the gland an option?

Removal of the third eyelid gland makes it much more likely that your dog will develop 'dry eye' in later life. This is a condition, where not enough tears are produced. Dry eye is painful and can result in loss of sight and loss of eye. Dry eye also is generally incurable and dogs with dry eye require life-long medical treatment to keep the eyes healthy and comfortable. Removal of prolapsed third eyelid glands is an ill-thought out operation that likely will have later complications and strongly advise against it.

What surgical options to address a cherry eye are available?

The most common procedure to address a cherry eye is a "pocket technique" where the gland is buried in a pocket of conjunctiva under the eye ball. The pocket is sown closed. The success chance of this procedure is very high (over 95%) and maintains the function of the gland. A further option is a 'tie-down' technique where the gland is fixed to tissue in the eye socket with permanent stitches. Sometimes, we may combine both techniques for a 'belt and braces' approach!

What do I expect after my pet has undergone a cherry-eye surgery?

Immediately post-operatively, the affected eye will be a little red and puffy looking but it should be kept open and comfortable. We usually ask you to make your dog wear a protective collar for a few days and there will be some eye drops and a pain killer to be given for about 10 days.



The right eye of a young Bulldog with third eyelid gland prolapse – also known as ‘cherry eye’. The right photograph has been taken immediately after the gland has been replaced surgically.

When is the eye ‘stable’ after surgery – so that I can start to play and exercise normally with my pet?

We usually only ask you to restrict exercise after a ‘cherry eye’ surgery for about a week.

What can go wrong with surgery to replace a cherry-eye?

Risks of cherry-eye surgery are extremely low with a success rate in the high 90% but include:

- Risks with general anaesthesia
- Rubbing of sutures on the cornea causing pain and corneal ulceration
- Reactions to the sutures holding the gland in place
- Infection
- Failure of the operation with recurrence of gland prolapse

Cherry eye surgery is hugely successful in our hands – but as with any surgical procedure, problems can occur occasionally. Please note that further surgery in case of complications or re-prolapse may incur additional fees.

How would I know if something has gone wrong after the operation?

Signs that your pet has complications include:

- Keeping the eye closed
- Increased weeping from the eye
- Pussy discharge from the eye
- Clouding of the normally clear cornea
- Re-prolapse of the gland

If you notice any of the above, please contact us so we can arrange a re-examination as soon as possible.