



## Eye Factsheet

# SARDS

### What is SARDS

SARDS is a condition in which affected dogs lose vision over a short period of time (days to weeks). On occasions, patients can lose sight overnight. Such a sudden loss of vision can be distressing and some affected patients are reluctant to move and especially to leave their familial environment.

### What causes SARDS

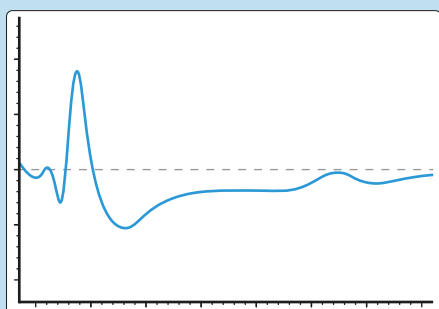
The blindness in SARDS is caused by a destruction of the photoreceptors in the retina – the film in the back of the eye that is essential for vision. We still do not know all the answers about SARDS but the destruction of the retinal receptors is believed to be caused by the body's immune system itself – an 'auto-immune' disease. What triggers the abnormal immune-response is not known but a genetic pre-disposition may be present in some affected patients as we see certain breeds such as the Cairn Terrier or the Dachshund more commonly affected than others.

### Do dogs with SARDS also show other signs of being ill?

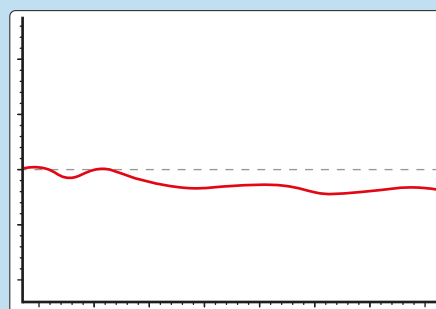
Most dogs with SARDS remain well in themselves and do not develop other problems. However, a period of eating and drinking/urinating more than usual precedes the sudden loss of vision in some patients and occasionally, this can persist and be associated with other signs such as confusion, weight gain, lethargy and behavioural changes. Occasionally, elevated enzyme levels suggestive of adrenal or liver disease are found but these only require more investigations or treatment in few patients. We usually recommend that dogs that show signs of drinking excessively or with increased hunger undergo blood tests to check out liver, kidney and adrenal gland function. In dogs, SARDS is not usually associated with cancers or other life-threatening conditions.

## How is SARDS diagnosed

Most patients with SARDS have a short history of vision loss and dilated pupils (over days to weeks) although occasionally, the condition can be more protracted and develop over a few months. Ocular examination confirms the reduced pupillary light responses but retinal examination is usually normal in patients presented early in the course of the disease – as such changes might not become evident for many months. Testing the retinal function with an electroretinogram is therefore essential in confirming the diagnosis of SARDS. Dogs affected with SARDS have no retinal responses and show a 'flat' trace in the electroretinogram. Dogs that have normal retinal function but have gone blind due to a brain problem on the other hand would have a normal retinal trace.



Normal electroretinogram (ERG) trace



'Flat' electroretinogram (ERG) trace  
in a dog with SARDS

## Can SARDS be treated

Unfortunately, there is no known treatment that reverses the destruction of the retinal damage in SARDS to date. Steroid tablets have been trialled to suppress the abnormal immune-response – but with no effect. Some researchers advocate the use of intravenous immuno-globulins but this treatment appears to have marginal benefits and carries a high risk with possible death due to an anaphylactic reaction. For this reason, we do not offer such treatment.

## Will my dog cope having lost vision due to SARDS

Losing vision suddenly can be very distressing and so early on, your dog will need some help to adjust to his or her blindness. However, most dogs do cope with vision loss remarkably well and tend to become confident quickly in their own environment. Some even enjoy going back to their normal activities – whilst others are more reluctant to venture on walks in unfamiliar environments and prefer to stick to the safety of their back garden – which is also ok!

It is very rare that a patient with blindness due to SARDS does not cope with their situation and would be more than happy to re-assess such a patient at any time and see, whether we can offer additional support in ensuring a good quality of life!