



## Distichia

### What are distichia?

Distichiasis is a common condition in dogs where extra eyelashes grow from the meibomian glands, which are located at the edge of the eyelid (normally no hairs grow from the eyelid margin). Some breeds are predisposed e.g. bulldogs, poodles, shelties.

### What problems do they cause?

Sometimes these abnormal hairs do not cause any problems. These are usually fine hairs, and don't always contact the cornea. When distichia grow in an abnormal direction, they can touch and irritate the cornea, leading to discomfort, redness, tearing, and even potential damage to the eye's surface if left untreated. They often have clinical signs of irritation (watery eyes) which develops in the first year or two, but they can also cause problems when older when the quality of the tear film starts to reduce.



### What is the treatment for distichiasis?

Each case is managed individually. If the distichia are not causing any problems, they are left untreated. **Lubricants** are often recommended. If they are irritating the eye, a surgical procedure is usually recommended to permanently remove them. **Plucking** of individual problematic eyelashes using tweezers can be effective for mild cases, but the hairs regrow in a few months. Hair growth follows a continuous cycle that includes growth, rest, and shedding phases. Therefore, not all hairs may be destroyed on the day of surgery as those which have recently fallen out won't be seen, and others may be dormant. For complete removal of all hairs, often more than one procedure is required.

- **Electrolysis:** Under general anaesthesia and using an operating microscope, a very fine electrolysis may be inserted along the shaft of the hair. The electrical current is applied which burns the hair follicle, thus destroying it.
- **Cryosurgery**, or freezing, of the hair follicles, is sometimes done. This has a similar goal, of destroying the hair follicle and thus preventing re-growth. The eyelids are usually quite swollen after surgery, but this is a temporary effect.
- **Surgical excision** of the distichia may be carried out in certain circumstances, and sometimes a row of distichia is more effectively removed using this method.

### Prognosis

Surgical treatment is usually curative. Most dogs recover fully and experience significant relief from the symptoms of the condition. However new hairs can emerge and therefore topical lubricants may be recommended on a longterm basis. New hairs that cause irritation would require another surgical removal, so repeat examination is required if similar symptoms occur in the future.

