



UVEITIS

What is UVEITIS?

Uveitis is inflammation within the part of the eye called the uveal tract. This is a blood vessel-filled layer of the eye that includes the iris (the colored part of the eye), the ciliary body (the part of the eye just behind the iris that produces the fluid within the eye and that is also important in focusing), and the choroid (which is in the back of the eye just behind the retina).

Causes

Uveitis can be caused by a primary disease of the eye (such as a cataract, a corneal ulcer, a tumor within the eye, or trauma), or can occur in association with an internal disease. Potential internal diseases that can cause uveitis include some types of infection (particularly those spread by ticks and some types of deep fungal infections) and some types of cancer (particularly a cancer called lymphoma). In addition, uveitis can be caused by an immune-mediated process (in which the body's own immune system attacks itself).

When the cause of the uveitis is not apparent after examining the eye, screening lab work, including a complete blood count, chemistry panel, and urinalysis, is often performed to evaluate your pet's overall health. This helps to narrow the search for the underlying cause and direct further tests and therapy. Other commonly performed diagnostic tests that can help to identify the underlying cause of uveitis include x-rays of the chest (to evaluate for disease within the lungs that could indicate infection or cancer) and titers for some of the more common infections. An ultrasound of the eye can also be helpful if the eye is too cloudy to directly evaluate inside the eye for a mass or to evaluate for a retinal detachment. If all of these tests are normal, we become suspicious that there is an immune-mediated cause for the uveitis.

Signs

Common signs of uveitis include redness or cloudiness of the eye, squinting, reduced appetite, reduced activity level, or other signs specifically associated with the underlying cause of the uveitis. For example, in some types of infection or cancer that involve the lungs, coughing may occur.

Treatment

Treatment should be directed at the underlying cause of the uveitis (if it can be identified). In addition, symptomatic treatment with anti-inflammatory medications (topical and/or oral) is prescribed to help to control the inflammation within the eye and reduce the potential for complications such as secondary glaucoma (high eye pressure).

Prognosis

The prognosis depends on the severity of the uveitis, the underlying cause, and how well it responds to treatment. If caught early and treated aggressively, uveitis can often be treated successfully. Some cases of immune-mediated uveitis are recurrent and require periodic or on-going treatment to maintain control of the inflammation. If the uveitis is not adequately controlled, complications such as secondary glaucoma or cataract formation can occur, both of which can result in loss of vision.

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