Cataract Surgery

UTCVM OPHTHALMOLOGY SERVICE

A cataract is any opacity within the lens of the eye. The lens sits within the eye and helps to focus images onto the retina. Cataracts can be caused by genetics, diabetes, aging, and other diseases of the eye such as retinal disease or inflammation. If cataracts are severe enough, visual deficits (e.g. bumping into things, missing treats or stairs) can be noted at home or in unfamiliar environments.

What do I need to do for my pet prior to cataract surgery?

In order to ensure the best chance of vision after cataract surgery, the health of both the eyes and the animal are evaluated. This includes

Health of the Eye:

- ❑ Complete ophthalmic exam by an ophthalmologist
- ❑ Electroretinogram (ERG) - this is an electrical test used to evaluate the health of the retina
- ❑ Ultrasound of the eye to evaluate the structural integrity of the retina and fluid behind the lens (the vitreous)

Health of the Animal:

- ❑ Physical exam including listening to the heart and lungs
- ❑ Basic blood and urine tests to evaluate the overall health of the animal

» ***Diabetic animals should receive additional diagnostics:***

- ❑ Fructosamine and glucose curve to evaluate for adequate diabetic control (occasional spot-checks are not adequate prior to surgery)
- ❑ Urine culture collected sterilely directly from the bladder, to ensure there is no active urinary tract infection present
- ❑ Blood pressure to ensure it is not elevated as this can complicate anesthesia
- ❑ FASTED (12 hours no food) triglycerides and cholesterol (fats) levels in the blood to ensure they are not elevated as this can complicate anesthesia and surgical outcomes

These evaluations should be performed within 1 month of the planned surgery to ensure we have the most up-to-date picture of your pet's health. If we have concerns regarding the health of your pet or your pet's eye, we may recommend additional treatments or diagnostics prior to surgery.

If there are significant findings on the above diagnostics, then we may not recommend going forward with cataract surgery if the chances for vision after the surgery are low or if anesthesia or surgery may compromise the overall health of your pet. Additionally, if there are any active health concerns (e.g. infection, dental issues) we may ask that you resolve these concerns prior to surgery as they may affect the surgery or recovery.

What are the risks of surgery?

Cataract surgery is generally safe and effective in restoring vision in 80-90% of cases. There are risks with any medical procedure, and cataract surgery is no exception. Some of these complications such as uveitis or inflammation are expected following surgery, and others occur either shortly after or months to years after surgery. Unfortunately there is a chance with these complications to either lose the vision we gain with surgery or in some cases, lose both vision and comfort, which sometimes necessitates removal of the eye in severe cases.

There is no way to predict who will have a successful outcome or complications but dogs with pre-existing ocular disease (inflammation, dry eyes) may have an increased risk of complications. In addition, some breeds have also been shown

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to have an increased risk with cataract surgery. Your cataract surgeon will discuss any specific concerns regarding the risks of surgery for your pet.

What should I expect after cataract surgery?

Post-operative care and evaluations are very important to ensure a good outcome with cataract surgery. Your pet will likely go home with several topical eye medications that will need to be given 2-4 times per day for at least a few months. You can expect to dedicate at least 15-20 minutes to apply the medications each time during the day to allow for the proper absorption of the medications.

In addition, we request follow-up visits so we can evaluate the eyes to ensure that they are recovering well from surgery and not developing complications. Usually recheck exams are scheduled one, three and seven weeks after surgery in the immediate post-operative period. More may be scheduled depending on how well the eyes heal. In addition, we request that the eyes be evaluated regularly the first year after surgery to ensure they remain healthy and visual.

If you are unable to give medications or eye drops to your pet or if you are unable to have your pet rechecked after the surgery with a veterinary ophthalmologist, we may not recommend surgery.

Have more questions?

Please don't hesitate to contact the UTCVM Ophthalmology Service at (865) 974-8387 to let us know if you have any further questions or concerns about cataract surgery or your pet's eyes.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the estimates for the surgery?

Initial eye exam & diagnostics	~$225
Electroretinogram & ultrasound	~$330
Systemic evaluation - blood and urine tests *(Can be performed with your regular veterinarian)*	~$300 - $500
Cataract surgery (One eye): (Both eyes):	~$3,100 - $3,500 ~$3,500 - $3,900
Total (One eye): **(Both eyes):**	**~$3,800 - $4,300** **~$4,300 - $4,700**

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These estimates may increase or decrease depending on the nature of the cataracts, the presence of systemic disease (e.g. diabetes), and if complications occur during or after the surgery.

2. How long will my pet have to wear a cone?

Your pet will have to wear a cone for at least 2-4 weeks after the surgery in order to make sure they do not damage the stitches that are placed in the eye with surgery. This is important because if they traumatize the surgery site, it will make infection or ulceration more likely which could jeopardize vision or comfort.

3. Can the cataracts come back after surgery?

Cataract regrowth is possible following surgery. Usually this only happens in very young animals and very rarely in older animals. In most cases this is not a serious concern. If this does occur, inflammation can result, and a repeat surgery may be needed to remove the regrowth.

4. Will my pet be able to see immediately after surgery?

In most cases, yes. If the cataracts are the sole reason for visual impairment, many of our patients are able to see much better than immediately before the surgery. The vision will not be crystal clear because some cloudiness occurs from the procedure, but that should improve with time.

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