



Reasons for "Blue Eyes" In Your Dog

By Rose DiLeva VMD, MS, CVCP, CVA, Animal Wellness Center



Have you ever looked at your dog's eyes and noticed that they appear to have a bluish or blue-gray color to them? I have had numerous people come into my hospital wondering just what this means. Some of them have observed their pet having difficulty maneuvering on the evening walk, especially at dusk. I have observed that these dogs often have trouble with judging perception, especially when going down steps. Initially, I will ask the owner what exactly they have observed regarding their pet's eyesight. Frequently, these dogs start to bump into things (furniture, the wall, the owner). Some dogs will actually rub their eyes or squint. Others may have excessive tearing or larger than normal pupils. Often these pets will miss if they are trying to jump up on a chair or the bed. They can also get confused and disoriented about their surroundings. The most common characteristic, however, tends to be the pet owners' observation of that bluish tint to the eyes.

There are a number of conditions that can cause compromised vision or complete blindness. Some of these are inherited and some are acquired. By far, the most common conditions I see are cataracts and nuclear sclerosis. Cataracts can develop slowly as your pet ages, but can also develop in just a few weeks if another medical condition, like diabetes or nutritional deficiencies, is present. Cataracts develop in the lens part of the eye, making it look cloudy as a result of proteins that accumulate there. The degree of cloudiness can vary and change over time. Cataracts are a common change that develops secondary to aging. These usually develop slowly which gives the pet a chance to try to acclimate to the situation. Early stage cataracts may not interfere too much with vision. Mature cataracts, however, can cloud up the entire lens making it impossible for your pet to see at all. Most cataracts start out as a bluish or grayish tint in the lens. These dogs, as I explain it to my clients, can still visualize but it's like looking through a fog. They can determine movement but not see the details of their surroundings too well. Cataracts, these days, can be surgically taken care of by a board certified veterinary ophthalmologist with an operating microscope that magnifies the eye and its structures. I worked with a veterinary ophthalmologist a long time ago. I was surprised to see that the suture material used to close the lens capsule was thinner than a strand of hair!

The second most common condition I see that causes that bluish haze in the lens is called nuclear sclerosis. This condition does not affect vision the way cataracts do. The lens fibers start to harden and over time these eyes can get that bluish or blue-gray color. Nuclear sclerosis, however, does not seriously affect the animal's ability to see, unlike cataracts. It does not need to be treated but one can do some things to help prevent or slow down its progression. A visit to a Holistic Veterinarian schooled in the use of herbs and nutraceuticals can give great suggestions.

All physical examinations done by your veterinarian should certainly include an assessment of the eyes and their structures. A proper ocular exam will be able to determine the difference between cataracts and nuclear sclerosis.

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