My Pets Eyes are Getting Cloudy- is that normal?

As our pets age we may notice a subtle change in their eyes or the sharpness of their vision.

“He just seems to lose me in the park”

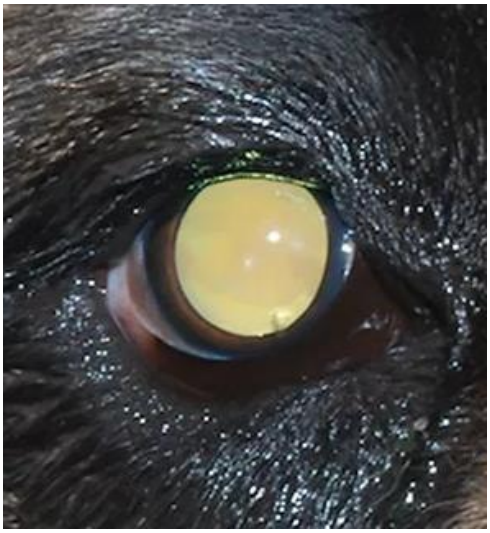
“The treat is right in front of them but they can’t find it”

“I’ve noticed this grey- blue haze in their eyes. Is that cataract forming? “

“She keeps tripping going up stairs or misjudges the footpath height on walks”

If you’ve heard yourself saying any of these, then please read on.

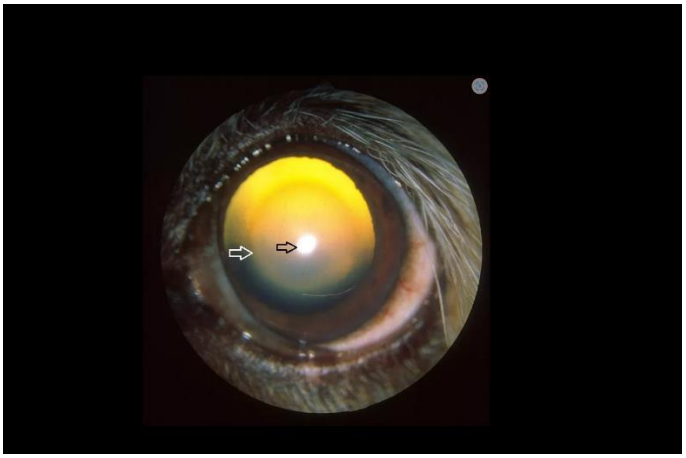
In distinguishing the cause of the change, a close examination of the eye is needed.



An age-related change is common in dogs (50% of dogs over approximately 9 years of age) and cats, and appears as a halo of density in the center of the eye. This is called **nuclear sclerosis** and it occurs because as the lens fibers continue to be laid down over time the fibers at the center of the lens become compacted and denser. Light can continue to reflect through the lens, so sight is still present but the sharpness of the image may become affected- similar to drawing a lace curtain over a window.

Normal lens and eye (image right). Note the clear reflection of light.

Nuclear sclerosis (image below left)



The white arrow indicates the edge of the lens nucleus (the beginning of the dense center) and the black arrow is the reflection of the flash.

Nuclear sclerosis must be distinguished from cataracts because cataracts can be a significant cause of vision impairment and blindness in dogs and cats. The change in the alignment of the lens protein may cause the lens to become gradually

opaquer thus obscuring the passage of the light through the eye.

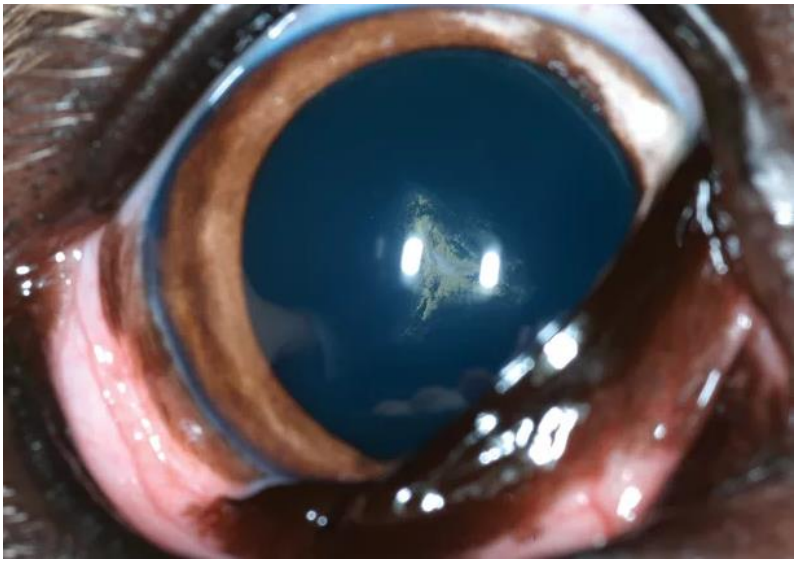
Such changes may occur in dogs or cats of any age for a variety of reasons:

- Congenital (more common in Himalayans, Persians, Birmans, British shorthaired cats and American Cocker Spaniel, Labrador Retriever, French Poodle, Boston Terrier and the Welsh Springer Spaniel dogs
- Traumatic e.g., after being struck in the eye with a ball, or penetrating injury
- Post-inflammatory e.g., after uveitis or inflammation inside the eye or inflammation caused by another disease in the eye such as progressive retinal atrophy
- Metabolic e.g., sugar diabetes is one of the most common causes in dogs
- Nutritional e.g., calcium related, can occur in puppies fed inappropriate milk supplements
- age-related

The end results being obstruction of the visual pathway and subsequent vision deficits.

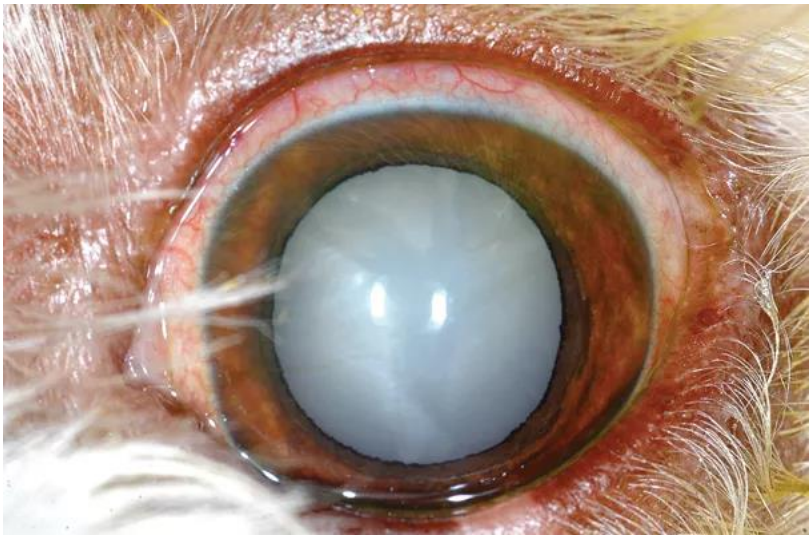
Cataracts develop over time causing a progressive reduction in how much light reflects off the back of the eye. The reduction correlates strongly with how much of an image can get through to the back of an eye and hence what your pet can see. The thicker or more mature the cataract, the less your pet can see. As a cataract develops the capsule that is wrapped around it may start to leak and this can lead to pain, inflammation and the development of other conditions such as glaucoma and lens induced uveitis.

Incipient Cataract occupy <10% to 15% of the lens and are associated with minimal vision impairment.



Immature cataracts that occupy from 15% to 95% of the lens

Mature cataracts that occupy 100% of the lens are associated with more significant deficits. Notice the inflammation (redness) in the whites of the eyes as well.



Why is it important to check in with us?

A vet check can allow a full physical examination, opportunity for blood test and assessment of the eye for concurrent conditions that if treated may stop or slow the progression of cataract development. A referral to a veterinary ophthalmologist can be given as well, where the cataract can be removed and replaced with an artificial lens but not before the retina is checked for functionality. The retina is the viewing surface of the eye (like the film in a camera) and must be functional in order for sight to be restored.

So, if you have ever asked any of the questions above, please come in to Vet HQ and allow us to check your pets' eyes.

Dr Caryn Wun BVSc