As pet owners, we all want to see our furry companions happy and healthy. One aspect of their health that's often overlooked until a problem arises is their vision. Eyes that are squinty, watery, or have noticeable discharge can indicate an underlying issue that requires immediate attention. Ignoring these symptoms can lead to serious, even irreversible, damage to your pet's eyes. In this edition, we'll discuss why it's crucial to have your pet's eyes checked when these symptoms appear, and why follow-up care is just as important.

Squinty Eyes and Discharge: Signs of a Potential Problem

If your pet's eyes appear squinty, red, or have excessive discharge, it could be a sign of several conditions, ranging from minor irritation to more serious eye infections or injuries. Some common causes of these symptoms include:

- **Conjunctivitis (Pink Eye):** This condition is often accompanied by redness, discharge, and squinting. It can be caused by bacteria, viruses, or allergies.
- **Foreign Bodies:** Small particles like dust, dirt, or even an eyelash can irritate the eye, causing squinting and discharge.
- **Dry Eye (Keratoconjunctivitis Sicca):** Insufficient tear production leads to dry, irritated eyes that can become inflamed and infected.

However, one of the most concerning causes of eye symptoms is a **corneal ulcer**.

What is a Corneal Ulcer?

A corneal ulcer is a painful wound or sore on the surface of the eye. These ulcers can result from injury, infection, or underlying health issues. In pets, they often present as squinting, excessive tearing, and discharge, and they can be easily mistaken for less serious eye irritations. However, corneal ulcers require prompt and specialized treatment.

If left untreated, an ulcer can worsen, leading to:

- **Infection:** The corneal tissue can become infected, resulting in more severe damage to the eye.
- **Scarring:** If the ulcer heals improperly or too slowly, it may leave a permanent scar, impairing vision.
- **Perforation:** In severe cases, an untreated ulcer can lead to the eye rupturing, which is an emergency situation requiring surgical intervention.

For this reason, **immediate veterinary attention is critical** if you notice any of the signs associated with a corneal ulcer. Early detection and treatment can prevent these complications and preserve your pet's vision.

Why Immediate Attention Matters

The health of your pet's eyes can deteriorate quickly. An eye condition that may seem minor at first can escalate rapidly without proper treatment. Corneal ulcers, for example, can worsen in just a matter of hours, so it's crucial to act fast. If your pet is squinting, producing discharge, or showing any signs of discomfort, don't wait to see if the problem goes away on its own.

When you bring your pet to the veterinarian, the doctor will perform a thorough eye exam, which may include:

- **Fluorescein Staining:** This test highlights any damage to the corneal surface, revealing the presence of an ulcer.
- **Pressure Test:** To check for conditions like glaucoma, which can also cause squinting and discomfort.
- **Culture and Sensitivity Test:** If an infection is suspected, this helps identify the right antibiotic or treatment.

The Importance of Follow-Up Care

Eye issues are often not resolved in a single visit. If your pet is diagnosed with an ulcer or another eye condition, it's essential to follow the prescribed treatment plan, which may include:

- **Medication:** Antibiotic ointments, drops, or oral medications may be necessary to treat infection and promote healing.
- **Preventing Further Injury:** Your veterinarian may recommend an Elizabethan collar (cone) to prevent your pet from rubbing or scratching the affected eye, which could worsen the condition.
- **Scheduled Follow-Ups:** Even if your pet seems better, follow-up visits are crucial to monitor healing progress and ensure no complications arise. The veterinarian will assess whether the ulcer is healing properly and if any additional treatments are needed.

Eye conditions can evolve, so consistent monitoring ensures that your pet's eye health remains stable and that any complications are addressed promptly.

Conclusion

Your pet's eyes are delicate, and any sign of discomfort—such as squinting or discharge—should never be ignored. Early diagnosis and treatment of eye issues, including corneal ulcers, can make all the difference in preserving your pet's vision and overall well-being. If you notice any unusual symptoms, schedule an appointment with your veterinarian right away, and remember that follow-up care is essential for a full recovery.

Keep your pet's eyes healthy, and they'll be able to continue looking at you with those loving, trusting

eyes for years to come!