

# Ask A Vet: Cloudy With a Chance of Cataracts

*Sunday, September 27, 2015*

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

My old terrier has developed cloudiness in both eyes. I have been told this is from cataracts. Is this true and will it affect his vision?

Dear Reader,

What you are most likely seeing in your dog is quite common if not a normal occurrence in an older dog. It very well could be cataracts, but even more likely is lenticular sclerosis. Both of these occur in the lens of the eye.

The lens is a clear disc that allows dogs (and us) to focus light onto the retina and therefore allow the brain to form an image. The lens is made of fibers and becomes denser with age as more fibers are laid down. Since the lens does not change in overall size it just becomes more compressed especially in the center. This creates the bluish haze often seen in older dogs eyes we refer to as lenticular sclerosis. It is usually equal in both eyes and does not seem to have much effect on vision. There is no recommended treatment nor is any needed for this harmless aging change.

Cataracts, on the other hand, are actual deposits within the lens that block light transmission. They appear as white or light grey and can be partial, or completely cover the lens causing blindness. There is no specific connection between the aging changes (sclerosis) and cataracts. There are many different causes for cataracts including congenital(born with); old age; genetic; dietary; and as a secondary effect of diabetes mellitus. Unlike sclerosis, cataracts may cause other problems to develop in the eye, some of which are painful and require medical attention. In select cases the lens with cataracts can be removed and replaced with an artificial lens. Most cases of cataracts in dogs are left untreated unless they are causing a painful condition or complete blindness.

Sometimes problems in other parts of the eye are confused with cataracts. Scarring or injury to the cornea (clear outside layer of the eye) is the most common of these and may represent a more urgent problem. Because the specific problems can have such different outcomes and may or may not require treatment it is a good idea to have your dogs eyes examined by your veterinarian to be sure.

-Dr. Justin Sellon