

A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES!

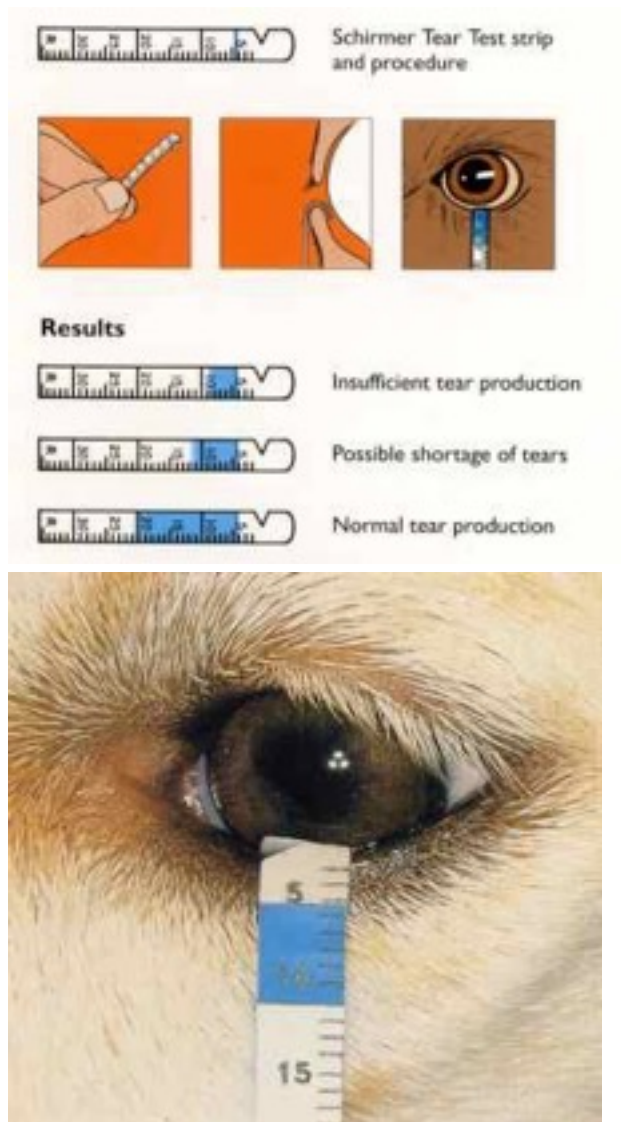
It was a typical Monday morning surgery; it was already busy with appointments and the phone had not stopped ringing since I arrived. I had seen several animals that were very unwell so I was running a little behind schedule when Samantha walked into my consulting room. Samantha was a 2 year old West Highland White Terrier, a spritely, happy go lucky dog who usually rushed into the room with her tail wagging madly. Today she was very subdued and I could immediately see that she had an eye problem as both her eyes were shut with a slimy yellow discharge surrounding them. Samantha was quite reluctant to have her eyes examined due to the pain they were causing her so I decided to apply some local anaesthetic to them and keep her at the surgery for further examination.

Later I cleaned up the discharge from her eyes and examined them more thoroughly. I measured the tear production in her eyes and this showed she was producing very little tears which are essential for keeping the front of the eye moist and free of dust and bacteria. Because of this shortage of tears, the accumulated debris on her eyes had caused irritation, resulting in a painful inflammation and ulceration of the eyes. Her eyes were so painful she could hardly open them!

Poor Samantha was anaesthetised and the ulcers in her eyes were treated. She had to endure many weeks of treatment with eye drops before they cleared up. She now has regular treatment to her eyes to treat the dry eye (Keratoconjunctivitis sicca or KCS) so producing enough tears to prevent the ulcers from happening again.

How is KCS diagnosed?

Most cases of KCS have very characteristic symptoms, which may lead you and your vet to be suspicious. However, as these symptoms can resemble simple conjunctivitis, to be sure of KCS, the dog's tear flow has to be measured.



This is done by the 'Schirmer Tear Test', and takes just one minute! It involves placing a standard paper strip between the lower eyelid and the eyeball for 60 seconds, and measuring the distance that the tears move along the strip. If the tears have moved more than 15mm, the dog is definitely normal. If the tears have moved less than 10mm, the dog is definitely abnormal and has KCS.

If your dog has a regular discharge from its eyes or suffers from recurrent eye problems then take it to your Veterinary Surgeon to have it checked. This 'dry eye' problem can occur in any dog although is especially common in the English Bulldog, West Highland White Terrier, cavalier King Charles Spaniel, Lhasa Apso and Shih Tsu. Otherwise it may end up in pain like poor Samantha and require many weeks or months of treatment, or in extreme cases, even become blind!

JON POWER B V Sc Cert AVP (vetGP) MRCVS; e mail contact
@somertonvets.co.uk