

My Westie Has Cataracts, What Now?

By Kay McGuire, DVM, MS

Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness in dogs. Although they may develop as a result of ocular trauma or inflammation, cataracts occur most frequently in purebred dogs, where they are nearly always inherited. The age of onset is variable, usually between 5-8 years of age. Diabetes induced sorbitol cataracts are also an issue in the Westie as iatrogenic diabetes or steroid induced diabetes is seen in the breed.

Surgical techniques have changed over the years as research has progressed. It was once thought to wait until a cataract “matures” to perform surgery. Now rather than waiting until the dog is blind in that eye, it is advantageous to perform the cataract surgery earlier avoiding complications associated with lens-induced uveitis. It is now more common to do unilateral cataract surgery than it was before.

There are two ways to remove a cataract. There is extracapsular extraction which involves a 180 degree incision in the front of the cornea with removal of the anterior lens capsule and manual removal of the lens cortex and nucleus. If the cataract is very dense, this is the method needed. The newer technique is like that done in human medicine, phacoemulsification. This method uses ultrasound waves to break up the cataract with simultaneous irrigation and aspiration of the lens fragments. This requires a small incision in the cornea allowing for a more thorough removal of the lens fragment. Phacoemulsification causes less damage done to the front chamber of the eye and has greater than 90% success rate. A synthetic lens may or may not be placed depending on the level of vision preferred.



What is Craniomandibular Osteopathy (CMO)? According to the Westie Foundation of America's Westie eBooks <http://www.westiefoundation.org/pdf/health/ebook/Topic5.pdf>, West Highland White Terriers are very highly affected with craniomandibular osteopathy (CMO), a nonneoplastic (not a tumor) disease altering form and function of the bones of the skull and mandible (jaw bone). This disease is known by several synonyms, such as 'mandibular periostitis', 'Westie jaw', 'Scottie jaw' and 'lion's jaw' (Alexander, 1983).

To request materials for the CMO Genetic Test please contact Patrick Venta, PhD., Associate Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine, Michigan State University at venta@cvm.msu.edu