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PAW'S CORNER

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By Sam Mazotta

Pet's dry eye may cause corneal scarring

DEAR PAW'S CORNER: My 9-year-old Terrier, "Buzzy," has developed what I think is an eye infection. She has red, irritated eyes and lots of yellowish discharge with runny tears. I called her veterinarian and will be taking her in to be seen this week. The tech on the phone told me it might also be "dry eye," which doesn't make sense with her runny eyes. What can I do to make her more comfortable ahead of the appointment? — Beth in Santa Monica, California

DEAR BETH: Gently clear away the discharge from around Buzzy's eyes with a soft washcloth dipped in warm water. Don't use soap, as this can irritate her eyes further. This will provide some relief.

The vet will check for several additional symptoms to determine what's going on.

Just as with humans, dogs and cats can develop dry eye, known in medical terms as keratoconjunctivitis sicca, or KCS. Several conditions can cause dry eye: infections, injury, certain medications, hypothyroidism or, most common, an immune disorder.

Dry eye can cause scarring of the cornea if left untreated, because the condition changes natural tears so they produce less of the "film" that protects the cornea's surface. If the damage is bad enough, your dog's vision could be permanently impaired. So prompt evaluation by a vet is important — kudos for contacting them so quickly.

There are very effective medications to manage Buzzy's symptoms, which stimulate tear production and replace tear film. During the first phase of treatment, you may need to administer these medications every two to six hours. Antibiotics may also be prescribed to treat any secondary infection.

After this initial phase, Buzzy will probably need lifelong treatment to manage dry eye.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.