



Enucleation

Enucleation is the surgical removal of an eye.

Why do we perform enucleations?

This operation is performed to remove a blind, painful eye that cannot be managed medically or surgically, or if there is a tumour inside the eye that may spread elsewhere in the body. End stage glaucoma often requires enucleation, as the eye fails to respond to treatment, resulting in sustained high pressure and unbearable pain within the eye. We do not need to remove a blind eye(s) unless they are causing your pet pain.

How do we perform enucleations?

Your pet will be admitted to the clinic in the morning. Following a light sedative, your pet will be anaesthetised and the hair around the eye clipped and the skin cleaned. The entire eyeball will be removed, and the resulting space closed by stitching the eyelids together over the eye socket. We usually use stitches which will be absorbed rather than need removal. Sometimes a bandage will be sutured over the site to provide a pressure dressing. An Elizabethan collar will also be provided. Your pet will go home on the day of surgery.

Sometimes a silicon implant is placed within the orbit once the eye has been removed. This helps to prevent the 'sunken' appearance that can sometimes occur after enucleation. This is not to be confused with an 'Intrascleral prosthesis'. After an enucleation, the eye is permanently closed and the hair will regrow over the surgical site.



Patient following enucleation of the right eye. © I.Mathieson

What do I have to do after the operation?

You will be provided with pain-killer and antibiotic tablets to give your pet for the week after the operation. If a pressure bandage is applied, you will return to the clinic within 3-4 days for its removal. Sometimes you will see a discharge from the wound or from the nose - this is normal, and is usually slight and for a limited time. A post-operative check is done after 7-10 days to check the wound has healed. The area will look a little strange initially, as the skin will be bruised and visible as will the sutures, but the hair will regrow and cover the resulting scar and your pet will look as if the eye is closed rather than removed. Most of our patients have the eye removed because of the pain it is causing and so they tend to be much happier following the surgery. After the initial antibiotic and pain-killer course is complete, no further medication will be required in the long-term.

What if I really don't want my pet to lose the eye?

Instead of removing the eye, in some cases we can replace the eye contents with a silicone prosthesis so that the cosmetic appearance of the eye can be maintained. See leaflet on *Envisceration with intrascleral prosthesis*



Patient following bilateral (both eyes) enucleation. This dog continues to lead a happy and healthy life. © I.Mathieson

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What do we do with the eye-ball?

We usually send the eyeballs to a special ophthalmic pathologist, who will look at a very thin slice of it under the microscope and tell us what diseases are present. This information is particularly useful if cancer is present so we can see if there is a risk of its spread to the rest of the body, or in eyes with glaucoma where we can check if the other eye will need treatment.

Coping with a blind dog

If your dog has had to have one or even both eyes removed, they are still able to have a good quality of life. In most cases, if the eye or eyes have been blind for a while, you will find your dog has already learned to compensate with being blind.

We recommend the following publications for you to read:

1. Living with blind dogs: A resource book and training guide for owners of blind and low-vision dogs. By Caroline D Levin. 1998. ISBN: 978-0967225340.
2. My dog is blind - but lives life to the full. By Nicole Horsky. 2010. ISBN: 978-1845842918



Tel. 01928 714040



admin@eye-vet.co.uk



www.eye-vet.co.uk