

EYE GUNK

Jill Valuet

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If you're looking for that perfect article about gross topics like pus-like discharge and crusty gunk, you are in luck and keep reading.

Eye gunk, eye boogers, crusties - it goes by a couple of unpleasant names. It's that gooey, liquid discharge that can feel like slim when you pet your dog's face and stains the skin around their eyes. Everything about a dog has a purpose, including this one. Dogs have a natural teary discharge. Under normal circumstances, purpose of these tears is to clear the eye of any debris. Normally a thin layer of fluid is produced to coat the eyes and excess fluid will drain into the tear ducts located in the corner of the eyes. Eye gunk happens when there's an excessive amount of discharge and that's called Epiphora. It can be anything from a thin, watery discharge to a thicker pus-like consistency. It can be a symptom of a larger problem.

There are several common causes of Epiphora:

1. Allergies & Daily Environment Irritants

Dogs live much closer to the ground than humans so inhale a larger amount of dust, pollen and other particles that their bodies may decide is harmful. An excess of any of these can lead to an overreaction in their tear ducts. Irritants include leaves, twigs and other debris that can get in the eye.

2. Conjunctivitis

This is more commonly known as pink eye and it's similar to what humans experience. It's an inflammation of the outer layer of the eye and inner layer of the eyelid. This results in the more pus-like discharge and is something that should be treated by a veterinarian.

3. KCS – Keratoconjunctivitis Sicca

This is more commonly known as dry eye. It results in an uncomfortable and itchy eye that the dog continually irritates. The corners of the eyes may appear brown and may result in a yellow-green discharge. This can be a result of a variety of causes such as tear duct issues, allergies or side-effects from medication. A veterinarian should treat this, as it can lead to blindness.

4. Glaucoma

There are two kinds of glaucoma in dogs: primary and secondary. In primary, the eye is unable to drain, which means the fluid backs up. The secondary is caused by trauma like inflammation or cancer. This can show up as cloudy eyes, along with the discharge. Some breeds are more predisposed to glaucoma than others. It's also common in senior dogs.

So how do we know if the eye gunk we're seeing is normal or something to worry about? Knowing our dogs will help. Some breeds, like toy poodles and flat-faced dogs, are more prone to eye gunk. If the color or smell changes, or if your dog suddenly paws at their eyes, it could be an indication of a larger problem. Basically, if it's wetter, gunkier, gloopier or stinkier than normal, then it's time to see the vet.

There are some things you can do to help dogs with Epiphora. Keeping their face trimmed is a must. The less hair there is around the eyes, the less chance there is that a hair in the eye causes more tears than necessary. Not to mention shorter fur means less space for the gunk to get into and turn crusty. Be careful of the shampoos and medications used around those eyes too, as some can hurt the eyes just as much as the initial irritant. There are commercial dog wipes that can be used, but a damp cloth works just as well.

I own a toy poodle, Pippin, who has constant eye gunk. I'm fortunate that he has black fur, so the stains are disguised. But I still have to frequently wash his face to clear the fur of the wet tears otherwise it turns into crusty, stinky gunk. According to my vet, there is nothing to worry about in his case. He's just one of those breeds who is always going to have weepy eyes.

As soon as I returned from the Foundation level massage workshop, I began massaging Pippin and I paid extra attention to the areas around his eyes. My hope was that with regular massage, those sinuses, tear ducts and weepy eyes of his could get some relief. As of the writing of this paper, Pippin has had five massages. In each, I paid extra attention to his face, in particular massaging all around the ocular orbit, including under the eye and all around the muzzle. I used small circular motions beginning at the corner of the eyes and moving around the bony structure of the eye. I also placed my finger directly over the eyes (with his eye closed) and very gently pressed to help relax and rejuvenate the eyes. And it has made a difference. In the past, Pippin would have eye gunk every day that would get crusty and stinky if not washed. Since the massages have begun, the eye gunk has diminished. He currently still gets the gunk, but the amount of it has decreased.

Regular pet massage is a great way to keep eye gunk, a normal but unpleasant aspect of our dogs, under control. A gunky, crusty, gloopy-free dog makes for a happier and healthier dog.

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