

General Information

A scratch of the eye's cornea (clear surface portion of the eye) is quite painful and can cause tearing, swelling of the eyelids, closing of the eyelids, and constriction of the pupil. Such scratches or a long-standing irritation of the cornea can lead to formation of an ulcer, or erosion of the cornea or even an abscess. Generally, corneal ulcers are caused by accidental poking of the eye, but occasionally other causes (ingrown eyelashes, splinters, dysfunction of the eyelids) can cause corneal ulcers. These problems should be ruled out by examination.

Routine traumatic corneal ulcers heal in a few days. Progression of healing is indicated by reduced pain and swelling, then possibly a few days of corneal cloudiness (edema) around the ulcer site, leading to a normal cornea. Infection of these injuries can result in permanent blindness or loss of the eye itself if not properly treated right away.

Important Points in Treatment

- ___ Always consult a veterinarian before applying any medication to your horse's eye to treat an eye problem.
- ___ Dilating medication, such as atropine, is applied to dilate the pupils. This helps relieve pain and keeps the pupil open to help prevent internal damage to the eye. Shine a light in your horse's eye and compare the pupil of the treated eye with the pupil of the normal eye. In the treated eye with atropine, the pupil is large and round. Remember, with dilation of the pupil, your horse's vision will be temporarily abnormal. It also leaves the eye vulnerable to sunlight and requires the horse to be kept in a shady environment. Consider this when riding and with extensive trail rides, new close quarters, jumping, etc. The pupil may remain dilated for several days after treatment.
- ___ Antibiotic medication prevents infection and allows natural healing of the ulcer. Cortisone products can impair healing and local defense mechanisms, and improper use of these cortisone products can lead to serious sight-threatening infections.

We recommend the following:

- ___ *Hot packing*: Soak a towel or wash cloth in water as hot as your hand can tolerate, and apply it over the eye. This is soothing and can reduce resistance to opening of the eyelid for application of medication.
- ___ Discourage your horse from rubbing its eye.

Call Our Office If:

- You have any questions concerning corneal ulcers.
- You are unsure if your horse's eye is healing properly.
- The eyelids have not re-opened in 3 days.
- Significant whitening of the cornea develops.
- The blue-white haze of the cornea does not disappear within 6 days.
- Your horse persists in rubbing its eye.
- You cannot apply the medication to your horse's eye as often as directed.