

Cataracts: What to Expect

Thank you for considering the MU Veterinary Health Center Ophthalmology Service for evaluation of cataracts in your pet and potential cataract surgery. We have provided some helpful information in this handout for your review prior to bringing your pet in for its first appointment. Please be sure to watch the video for which we have provided a link at the end of this handout.

Why should you consider cataract surgery for your animal?

Cataract surgery is one of the most rewarding procedures veterinary ophthalmologists have the privilege of performing in animals. The goal of surgery is to take a blind pet and restore vision, thus significantly improving the pet's quality of life. A second important reason to consider pursuing surgery is that cataracts, when left untreated, often cause secondary changes in the eye that may result in severe ocular discomfort. Two common complications in untreated cataract patients are uveitis (inflammation inside of the eye) and glaucoma (elevated pressure inside of the eye).

Steps to take prior to your pet's first appointment:

Our first goal in providing you and your pet with optimal client and patient care is to determine if, in fact, your pet has cataracts. There are some conditions that will appear like cataracts, but in fact, are not (for example, endothelial degeneration or dense nuclear sclerosis). We are happy to examine your pet at our earliest available appointment to first answer this question for you. However, if you or your primary care veterinarian are confident that cataracts are present, in order to ensure cataract surgery can be performed as promptly as possible in your pet, it is important that your pet be in good health prior to surgery. For this reason, we recommend your pet have the following tests/procedures performed by your primary care veterinarian FIRST:

1. Complete bloodwork, including a complete blood count (CBC) and chemistry profile
2. Urinalysis with culture and sensitivity
3. A dental cleaning if dental disease is present to minimize the risk of oral bacteria contaminating the inside of the eye during cataract surgery performed by your primary care veterinarian prior to surgery.
4. If your pet is diabetic, a glucose curve is essential (see details below)

These can be performed before or after your initial exam with our service in which we will confirm and evaluate the extent of cataract development in your pet, but these tests/procedures ARE REQUIRED prior to undergoing cataract surgery in the vast majority of our patients.

Additionally, if your pet has other systemic illnesses, such as skin/ear infections or diabetes, it is **very** important these conditions are controlled prior to surgery. For example, if your pet is diabetic, a glucose curve should be performed to ensure that the diabetes is well controlled. In addition, a urine culture with sensitivity should be performed to ensure that a bladder infection is not present, as diabetics are more susceptible to infections. If an infection is present within the body, it could spread to the eye via the bloodstream during cataract surgery, causing a vision threatening intraocular infection.

What to expect at your pet's first appointment

University of Missouri Veterinary Health Center
900 E. Campus Drive Columbia, MO 65211
573-882-7821
vhc.missouri.edu

During the initial consultation with our specialty service, you and your pet will meet our team members who will take a history, perform initial screening tests and examine your pet. You will then meet a veterinary ophthalmology resident and/or a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist faculty member who will examine your pet's eyes closely both before and after pupillary dilation. The doctors will determine the severity of the cataracts and if any other eye conditions are present which require management prior to surgery. The cost of this initial examination is approximately \$350, which does not include any medications prescribed at that time.

If your pet is deemed healthy and the cataracts are at a stage where surgery is recommended, the doctors will recommend further testing to determine if your pet is a good candidate for cataract surgery. These tests will usually be scheduled for a later date with tentative surgery the following day. These tests include an electroretinogram (ERG), ocular ultrasound, and gonioscopy. The cost for the examination that includes these three additional screening tests is approximately \$1,000 to \$1,300. Some pets may require sedation for the testing. Providing the test results are normal, we will then plan to move forward with surgery. It is important for owners to realize that **at no time** can the ophthalmology service guarantee that surgery can be performed the day following the diagnostic testing (there is currently a three - to four-week waiting period) and typically most pets require several weeks of pre-treatment medications, as well as the aforementioned tests be performed, prior to being deemed a good surgical candidate.

Cost estimate for cataract surgery

Cataract surgery in our domestic animals requires full general anesthesia. The cost estimate for cataract surgery in one eye at this time (March 2025) is \$4,900-5,500. For surgery performed on both eyes under the same general anesthetic episode (which is typically in the best interest of our patients), the estimate is \$5,600-6,700. This estimate is all inclusive of the pre-operative ophthalmic diagnostics (ERG, ocular ultrasound, gonioscopy); note however that our estimate does not include recheck examinations (which are approximately \$300 each), or any additional procedures that may be recommended after surgery or medication refills. Please note that these are just estimates and are subject to change.

By entrusting us with the care of your pet, you can expect to receive state of the art diagnostics and surgery with the ADDED BENEFIT of your animal being under the supervision and care of world-class veterinary anesthesiologists for the required general anesthesia. Additionally, if your pet has significant additional health problems (such as heart disease, various endocrine diseases such as Cushing's and/or diabetes), the MU-VHC ophthalmology service has immediate access to board certified specialists in internal medicine and emergency and critical care, making our facility one of the SAFEST in the country. ***Our goal is to provide you and your beloved pet with world-class veterinary care!***

What to expect when your pet is scheduled for cataract surgery

Your pet will be scheduled to come in the day before surgery and potentially stay two nights in our hospital. If you live locally, you may be able to take your pet home the night prior to surgery and potentially the night following surgery depending on how surgery went. Additionally, if you are from out of town and elect to stay at a hotel in town, there are options that allow pets. Immediately prior surgery, our ophthalmology staff and doctors will perform another pre-surgical examination to monitor for any changes that may have occurred in your pet's eyes.

The doctors will then review with you the details of surgery, after-care requirements, recheck appointments, and you will be asked to fill out several forms before leaving your pet. During your pet's stay, you will receive a minimum of two updates via phone per day. If your pet does not stay in hospital, we will need you to bring your pet to our hospital no later than 7:15 am the morning of surgery. Typically, your pet will go home one day after surgery has been performed. In most cases, we recommend recheck examinations at one week, three weeks, and six to eight weeks, four months, eight months, and then yearly after surgery. Your pet will also need to wear a hard plastic e-collar (cone) for at least the first month after surgery.

We are here to support you

At every examination, you and your primary care veterinarian will be provided with a written summary of our examination findings and detailed instructions of medical therapy. This is especially important because the initial month after cataract surgery demands frequent topical and oral medical therapy and we rely on excellent teamwork among our hospital personnel, the owner's careful adherence to instructions, and your primary care veterinarian's assistance in some of the follow-up care. You will also be provided with handouts that discuss cataracts in more detail. Finally, we recommend to all our prospective clients that you watch the following video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yypMG4kB8zc>

Last document update April 7, 2025 by Dr. Giuliano, Professor of Ophthalmology and Section Chief.