



"Tilly" - Labrador with Cherry Eye



Tilly



Cherry Eye

Unlike humans, dogs are blessed with three eyelids for each eye; upper, lower and third eyelid or nictitans membrane. The latter is invisible in normal circumstances and is located in the medial corner of the eye. It contains a prominent tear gland that aids in the production of tears. When this gland protrudes, it becomes irritated and appears swollen and red, like a small fruit hence the name "cherry eye".

Tilly, a young Labrador, was presented with this problem. Although the diagnosis is usually made by the very typical appearance, as was in Tilly's case, it can sometimes require further investigation to differentiate from tumours or foreign bodies. If left untreated, this unsightly problem develops into dry eye, (keratoconjunctivitis sicca), a severe and debilitating condition in which the patient lacks tear production and needs life long treatment.

In order to avoid any serious complications Tilly was treated with a commonly used surgical procedure, the 'pocket technique'. A pocket is created deep in the third eyelid in which the prolapsed gland is fixed with tiny stitches. Unfortunately, recurrence can be a problem as the delicate stitches can break down before healing is completed. Development of cherry eye in the second eye can occur as well. In these circumstances further surgery is inevitable.

Sadly, despite our best efforts 20% of the patients can still go on to develop dry eye. Nonetheless, for most dogs, surgery is curative and it prevents lifelong eye treatment. Fortunately for Tilly, the surgery so far has been successful. She is one of the lucky ones for whom "life is just a bowl of cherries!"

Michele Lampens MRCVS