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HORNER'S SYNDROME

The signs of Horner's syndrome include a sunken eye, a small pupil, an elevated third eyelid and a droopy upper eyelid. These signs result from damage to a specific nerve supply to the eye, called the sympathetic nerve supply. The sympathetic nerve supply travels from the brain down the spinal cord into the chest cavity, then back up the neck and through the ear to finally reach the eye.

Causes

An injury to any part of the nerve as it passes from the brain to the eye can cause Horner's syndrome. In most cases in dogs, Horner's syndrome is idiopathic. This means a cause cannot be identified and the syndrome resolves on its own within months. Other causes include chronic ear infections; tumors or trauma involving the neck, brain, ear, and chest; injuries to the neck from fighting or choke collars, and blood sampling.

What to watch for

The typical signs of Horner's syndrome are a droopy upper eyelid, a sunken eye with prominent third eyelid, and a small pupil.

Diagnosis

A complete ophthalmic examination can provide the diagnosis of Horner's syndrome. The diagnosis can be confirmed by pharmacologic testing. In this test, a drop medication that stimulates the interrupted nerve is placed in both eyes. If Horner's syndrome is present then the signs should improve or go away. Other diagnostic tests may be done to identify the cause of the Horner's syndrome.

Treatment

Any underlying causative disease is treated appropriately. Horner's syndrome itself is not painful, and in idiopathic cases treatment is not necessary.