

Enucleation

What is an 'enucleation'?

Enucleation is an operation to remove an eye.

Why is an enucleation performed?

Enucleation is usually advised if your pet has a blind, painful eye which cannot be treated or controlled in any other way.

Common reasons why enucleation is recommended include:

- Glaucoma – high pressure inside the eye leading to vision loss and severe, unrelenting pain.
- Cancer inside the eye.
- Infection or inflammation that cannot be controlled with medication.
- Severe trauma that cannot be repaired.

The pain associated with conditions like glaucoma is intense and constant, much like a migraine. This type of pain often responds poorly to medication leaving enucleation as the kindest option for many pets.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthesia. Fur is clipped from a front leg to allow the anaesthetic injection to be administered, and from around the affected eye. The eye and eyelids are completely removed and then the eyelid skin is stitched closed over the empty socket.

How do I care for my pet following an enucleation?

Most animals take a few days to recover from an anaesthetic and an enucleation.

Most pets go home the same day, but if your pet has surgery in the afternoon or is elderly, overnight hospitalisation may be advised. Pets that go home on the day of surgery should be kept warm and quiet, and offered a light meal that evening. Food should be softened for a few days as there may be some discomfort chewing, but the discomfort rapidly resolves.

Antibiotics and pain killers are given orally after surgery, and your pet may need to wear an Elizabethan collar if it is rubbing the operation site.

You may notice a small trickle of blood stained fluid from the wound or from the nostril on the same side as the operation. This should be mild and should stop within a couple of days of surgery.

We usually place dissolvable stitches under the skin which do not require removal. Post-operative checks are advised at approximately 5 and 10 days after surgery, and these may be performed with your own vet. If you are worried about your pet then you should telephone the hospital.

What will it look like?

There may be some bruising and swelling immediately after surgery but this should resolve over a few days. The hair will grow back after a few weeks making the wound less obvious.

The skin can slowly sink into the socket of the eye over time but there are techniques available to help minimise this cosmetic appearance.



"Pepsi"



"Casey"



"Trudy"

It may not be immediately obvious that an eye has been removed after full recovery, particularly if your pet has a dark coat or long fur.

How will it affect my pet?

If your pet has a blind, painful eye, enucleation provides great relief and many owners will notice that their pet is much happier and livelier than it was

before the operation. There is no pain associated with the surgical site in the long-term.

What happens to the eye after removal?

The enucleated eye is usually sent to a specialist pathologist to confirm the cause of the problem inside the eye. Confirming the diagnosis is really important as it may have implications for your pet's other eye or, indeed, it's general health, and should be performed in almost all enucleated eyes.

Are there any alternatives to enucleation?

In some dogs, a technique called an 'intrascleral prosthesis' can be used to give a more cosmetic appearance. It involves removing the contents of the eye, but leaving the "outer shell" and placing a black silicone ball inside it. The eye can still move and blink but is blind and usually looks black. This procedure takes longer to heal and there are more potential complications than an enucleation. The procedure cannot be used if your pet's eye is infected, ruptured, ulcerated or has cancer, and it is not recommended if your pet has had problems with corneal ulcers or dry eye. It is not advised in cats. It is also not as helpful if pathology is needed to confirm a diagnosis. We perform this procedure at Rutland House Referrals but must stress that the cosmetic benefit is for you, the owner, and your family, and **not** for your pet.

If you have any further questions do not hesitate to contact the Ophthalmology department at Rutland House Referrals on 01744 853510.