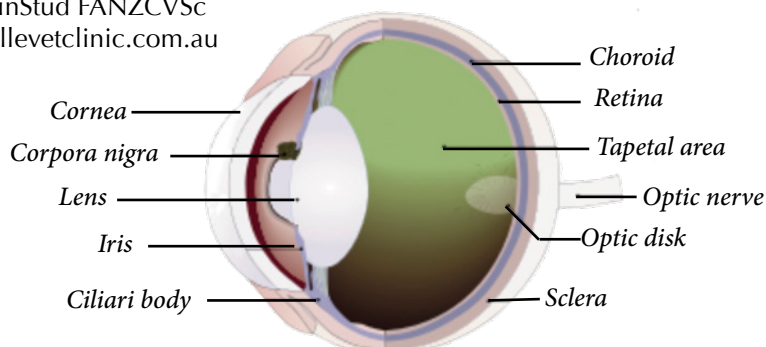


Equine Cataracts

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A healthy eye is vital for the well-being of the horse and the rider, so if you suspect something is wrong with your horse's eye or eyesight get them checked by your veterinarian.

We know that cataracts commonly affect elderly humans, but they are also seen in horses. The term cataract refers to a 'milky' opacity within the lens of the eye. The lens is located behind the cornea (clear surface of the eye) and the pupil.

Cataracts can be congenital in nature (i.e. foals are born with them) and are often recognised within the first month or so of life. Owners may notice the foal hesitant to walk through gateways or into a stable as vision deteriorates. Adult onset cataracts usually develop subsequent to trauma to the eye or uveitis (severe inflammation of the internal structures of the eye). Small cataracts may not be associated with any vision loss, however as cataracts progress and become more opaque, blindness increases.



Prognosis:

Unfortunately it is difficult to predict the rate of progression of a cataract, so if your horse has evidence of one, it is best to get it checked by your veterinarian as part of an annual health check so as to monitor for any changes in cataract size or severity.

Age associated cataracts can develop in horses once they reach their late teens or early twenties. Vision loss in these senior horses can be variable and some affected individuals appear to maintain acceptable eyesight.

Is surgery an option?

Cataract surgery is possible in the horse, but is usually reserved for foals with congenital cataracts. Due to the fact that cataracts in adult horses are often secondary to trauma or uveitis, surgery in these horses can be associated with increased risk of complications and consequently a poorer visual outcome. A reduced or absent pupillary light response (i.e. normal constriction of the pupil to light) may indicate more severe disease to the cells in the back of the eye and progressive blindness, although more sophisticated tests can be performed by a veterinary ophthalmologist to more closely assess the eye.

In foals the most common surgical treatment for cataracts is to remove the 'cloudy' lens. The lens's purpose is to allow the eye to focus on objects, so following lens removal the foal will be far-sighted (i.e. unable to focus on close objects) but can still have acceptable vision provided complications don't develop.

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