

Matt from Modesto writes in concerning his 18-month-old Rottweiler named Baron. Baron is having a problem with excessive tearing in both eyes and has had this problem for several months. Matt has treated the eyes with various prescribed eye drops and ointments without any real improvement. In fact, lately it appears to be worsening.

Excessive tearing is an indication of irritation to the eyes. Tearing is the mechanism the eyes use to clear irritants from the eye. If these irritants are not cleared, the tearing will continue. There are several possibilities that come to mind concerning Baron's tearing problem.

Baron needs to have his eyes and eyelids examined by his veterinarian. There are allergic conditions, pollens in the air for example, that can cause excess tearing. In Baron's case, I would put this possibility lower on my list due to the consistency of the problem and lack of response to previous treatment. Another possibility is damage to the outer covering of the eyes, the corneas. This layer is a very important structure and when it is compromised, tearing can be tremendous. This can happen if the eyes are scratched or rubbed and the outer layer of the cornea is scored. There is a very revealing and simple test that we as veterinarians use to check the corneas for damage. A tiny amount of fluorescent dye is placed in the eyes and an ultraviolet light is shined into the eyes, which will illuminate the stain. Any damage to the outer layer of the cornea will allow the stain underneath and will show as a fluoresced area.

I mentioned earlier that Baron's eyelids need to be examined as well. There are lid problems that can lead to corneal damage. One condition that can do so is termed dystichiasis. This condition involves eyelashes growing from the eyelid margins in a direction oriented more toward the eye instead of outward. These hairs can contact the cornea of the eye and cause a constant irritation often resulting in damage to the cornea.

Another condition that can cause corneal damage involving eyelid structure is called entropion. This condition is inherited and results from excess eyelid tissue either upper lid, lower lid or both. As a result of this excess tissue, the lids can roll inward bringing the eyelashes into contact with the corneas on every blink. As you can imagine this is extremely irritating and can cause irreparable damage to the eyes. Rottweilers are a high incidence breed for this problem.

These are but a few possibilities for Baron's tearing problem, there are many others. Hopefully a visit to his doctor will reveal a diagnosis and a course of treatment to cure the problem.