

# Nictitans Gland Prolapse

Ophthalmology Service



Michigan Veterinary  
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www.michvet.com

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## LOCATIONS:

29080 Inkster Rd.  
Southfield, MI 48034  
(248) 354-6660

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1425 Michigan St. NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
(616) 284-5300

## AKA “Cherry Eye”

A nictitans gland prolapse is an abnormal flipping out of position of the tear gland located behind the third eyelid or nictitans. This tear gland is responsible for 30-50% of the tears needed to lubricate the eye.

### Cause

The exact cause of this condition is unknown. It is believed that there is a weakness of the fibrous attachment that holds the gland in place. The gland may become cystic and flip out of normal position. Certain breeds of dogs are prone to developing a nictitans gland prolapse, although many other breeds may be affected. Nictitans gland prolapse is more likely to occur in younger dogs than older dogs.

### Treatment

Untreated prolapsed glands often become inflamed, cause excessive tearing and may obstruct vision. Continued inflammation of the prolapsed gland may result in decreased tear production and a dry eye syndrome. Simple gland excision may result in dry eye, especially in breeds predisposed to dry eye. For this reason, the recommended treatment is surgical replacement of the gland into its normal position rather than removal. Occasionally complications associated with nictitans gland prolapse surgery occur. Approximately 5% of dogs have recurrent gland prolapse after surgery. A repeat surgery is recommended if this occurs. Nictitans swelling and ocular discharge is common for 5 to 7 days after surgery.

### Breeding of Dogs with a Nictitans Gland Prolapse

Currently, the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists and the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) have no recommendations on restriction for breeding of dogs with nictitans gland prolapse. If there is a familial history of this condition, restrictions of breeding should be considered.



### Symptoms

Most pet owners will notice a pink tissue in the inside corner on the affected eye. Frequently, the gland will disappear and reappear without treatment before it finally remains in the abnormal position.

### Commonly Affected Breeds

American Cocker Spaniel

English Bulldog

Lhasa Apso

Shar pei

Giant Breeds