

Feline Conjunctivitis – Troubleshooting the Red Runny Eye

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Feline conjunctivitis represents one of the most common yet diagnostically and therapeutically challenging ophthalmic conditions encountered in small animal veterinary practice. The clinical presentation is often multifactorial, requiring a structured diagnostic approach to distinguish between infectious, immune-mediated, and secondary causes. Typical clinical signs include conjunctival hyperemia, ocular discharge, blepharospasm, and sometimes corneal lesions.

A thorough diagnostic work-up is essential for appropriate case management. Conjunctival cytology is emphasized as a practical first-line test due to its low cost and rapid clinical utility. Sampling following topical anesthesia allows identification of characteristic findings such as eosinophils in eosinophilic keratoconjunctivitis or intracellular elementary bodies suggestive of chlamydial infection. Additional diagnostics, including bacterial culture, polymerase chain reaction (PCR), and immunofluorescence assays, may be indicated depending on disease chronicity and severity. Serological testing has limited value for feline herpesvirus infection due to high background seroprevalence, although it may assist in monitoring therapeutic response in selected infectious conditions such as bartonellosis.

Infectious etiologies commonly implicated include feline herpesvirus-1, *Chlamydophila felis*, and *Mycoplasma* spp. Treatment strategies vary according to underlying cause. Empirical therapy may be appropriate in mild or first-time cases, whereas confirmed chlamydial or mycoplasmal infections typically require topical oxytetracycline and/or systemic doxycycline therapy. Management of feline herpesvirus-associated disease focuses not only on acute infection but also on recognition and treatment of long-term sequelae.

Complications of chronic or severe conjunctivitis can significantly impact ocular health and visual prognosis. These include geographic corneal ulcers, symblepharon formation in kittens, secondary entropion, eosinophilic keratitis, and corneal sequestrum. Early intervention, appropriate use of topical antimicrobials and lubricants, and owner education regarding eyelid manipulation in affected kittens are critical to reducing adhesion formation and preserving ocular function. Surgical intervention may be required in selected cases, although outcomes may be guarded in extensive disease.

A systematic diagnostic algorithm combined with targeted therapy and proactive management of complications remains central to successful clinical outcomes. Ultimately, optimizing care for feline conjunctivitis requires balancing evidence-based diagnostics with practical considerations in general practice settings.