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German Shepherd Pannus

What is pannus? Pannus is a non-painful, autoimmune disease of the cornea and conjunctiva of both eyes. Affected dogs suffer from a misdirected immune response to their own corneas that manifests itself as blood vessels, pigmentation, and scar tissue in the cornea. With time, the normally clear corneas opacify, and some dogs eventually go blind.

Are certain breeds more likely to develop pannus? Yes. approximately 90% of dogs with pannus are German shepherds. Other affected breeds include Belgian tervuerens, Siberian huskies, border collies, and greyhounds, although other breeds may be affected.

How is pannus treated? The corneas will clear significantly after 1-2 months of diligent eye drop application. Some dogs respond best to corticosteroid eyedrops, while others respond best to cyclosporine eye drops. More severe cases require treatment with both types of eye drops. Additionally, your dog may require a corticosteroid injection around the eye to augment your eye drop treatments.

Can pannus be cured? Unfortunately, no. For this reason, the key to the long-term preservation of vision is faithful, uninterrupted medication of the eyes and regular evaluations by a veterinarian.

Are surgeries available to help my dog? If the eye drop treatments fail in spite of our best efforts, your dog may benefit from a local application of Beta-Radiation with or without surgical excision of the corneal scar tissue. With your dog under general anesthesia, a radioactive probe is placed upon the cornea, and a specified dose is delivered. The remainder of the eye and body is unaffected due to the poor penetration of the low energy beta particles. Beta radiation will not cure pannus, but in most cases will augment your efforts with the eye drops. Beta radiation slightly injures the normal cornea. Thus, a dog may withstand 2-3 applications over a lifetime. For this reason, beta radiation is reserved for the dog who fails maximal medical treatment.

The most important factor in preserving your dog's vision is diligent, uninterrupted eye drop treatments.