

Getting Eye Drops Into Your Dog

Try these methods for administering prescribed eye drops.

By Jon Geller, DVM

Q. I am having a hard time putting veterinarian-prescribed drops in the eyes of my 3-year-old English Springer Spaniel who has an eye infection. Any suggestions?

A. Medicating your dog's eyes can be challenging and frustrating. It can be like trying to land a jet plane on an aircraft carrier in rough seas. Your dog will bob and weave, and duck and blink, and the drops fall harmlessly on his forehead.

Use a dual approach of distraction and deception. With one hand, or with a helper, hold a treat up above your dog's nose. With the other hand, sneak up over the top of his head with the eye drops, holding your hand close to his head so he can't see it. Then gracefully slip the dropper bottle over his eye, squeezing at the same time while you move the treat a little closer to his nose. If you are successful, certainly give your buddy a treat. If not, try again.

With some dogs, these finesse moves will not work, and it may be more like wrestle-mania. Someone will need to hold your dog in a headlock, with their arm around his neck, while you quickly drop in some medication, knowing that a fair amount will be wasted and refills may be required.

Be careful using this technique with short-nosed, bulgy-eyed dogs, because over-enthusiastic restraint around the neck can lead to the unfortunate, and dismaying, condition known as a proptosed globe. In simpler terms, the eyeball pops out of the socket. Although this problem is fixable at your local emergency clinic, it is expensive and uncomfortable for the dog.

A last resort could be a switch to an eye ointment instead of drops. The thicker ointment only needs to be applied to the inside of the lids, where it will then spread over the eye after the lids are closed. Care must be taken not to touch the cornea, the surface of the eye, with the tube, since it can cause damage.