

Feeding the Fluffy Bichon Frise

Learn how to choose the best food for your Bichon.

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Tearstains Was it something My dog ate?

Medically speaking, excessive tearing is called epiphora. The end result of epiphora is often tearstaining streaky reddish-brown smears that mar an otherwise perfectly white face. We wipe them off, clean them up, and the next day they're back again.

So what causes the stain? Tears are normally colorless, but they dry to a dark reddish-brown color because they contain pigments called porphyrins, as well as other pigment-like compounds. In addition, the constant dampness irritates the skin and fosters subsequent bacterial and yeast growth.

Some breeders believe that dietary factors may play a role in tearstaining, but epiphora is most commonly caused by either overproduction of tears or an abnormality in the drainage of the tears from the eye. Overproduction of tears usually occurs in response to an irritation or inflammation stemming from allergies, eyelid or eyelash abnormalities, or excessive hair at the inner corner of the eyelid. Abnormal tear drainage may occur when the tear duct is blocked, scarred or deformed.

Although diet is not the most common cause of tearstaining, some proposed dietary factors include:

Highly pigmented foods, such as beet pulp, or artificially colored foods Additives or preservatives in dry food Substances in drinking water, such as iron and minerals The following nutritionally based measures have been suggested to reduce or eliminate tearstaining: Vitamin C supplementation Parsley flakes Wheat-germ-oil supplementation Bottled water Raw-food diet Natural diet with no additives, preservatives or food coloring

It certainly won't hurt your Bichon if you switch it to bottled water, but some of the above remedies could have detrimental effects. For instance, vitamin C supplementation could be harmful to a Bichon that's prone to calcium oxalate urolithiasis (urinary stones), because the resulting acidic urine could promote urolith formation.

Overall, there's little evidence to indicate that dietary factors play a major role in epiphora and tearstaining. So, if your Bichon has tears, it's probably not something it ate. It's more likely that it's producing too many tears or they aren't draining correctly. Your veterinarian or a veterinary ophthalmologist can determine why and prescribe treatment to correct the problem.

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