

## Is It Cataracts?

**Find out what's behind those cloudy eyes.**

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You're lovingly caressing your dog's face when you notice a cloudiness in her eyes. Your first thought? Oh, no, Maggie has cataracts. Hold on. Take it easy.

Many dog owners don't know about a common and very normal, age-related change that mimics cataracts in appearance: lenticular, or nuclear, sclerosis. It leads to clouding in the eye and frequent owner alarm.

But most owners need not worry: Lenticular sclerosis is quite common in older dogs and doesn't lead to blindness. If the dog is 8 or 10 years old, the odds are better that it's nuclear sclerosis than cataracts, says Carmen Colitz, DVM, Ph.D., assistant professor of ophthalmology at Ohio State University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Haze Makers That cloudiness or eye haze you see in your dog's eyes—whether caused by nuclear sclerosis or cataracts—occurs within the eye's lens, an M&M-shaped structure situated behind the iris, surrounded by a capsule, and comprised of tightly wound protein fibers. These specialized fibers provide the elasticity that allows the lens to change shape for focusing. Nuclear sclerosis is a gradual increase in the density, or hardness, of the lens. It becomes noticeable in a murky sort of way in dogs around the age of 7 or 8. Breed and gender don't play a role, but sun exposure may accelerate sclerotic changes in the lens. Cataracts, on the other hand, result from ruptures in the normal arrangement of the lens fibers. Although most of us think of cataracts as a senile change, they can occur in dogs of any age, even newborn pups. They can grow slowly or occur almost overnight. Most cataracts have genetic causes. At-risk breeds include the Cocker Spaniel, Boston Terrier, Toy Poodle, Siberian Husky, and Miniature Schnauzer.

Diabetes and other metabolic diseases also can trigger cataract formation. Additional causes include infections, eye trauma, and exposure to toxins, such as pesticides.