

Facial Weakness/Paralysis

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What is facial paralysis?

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What are the symptoms of facial paralysis?

Facial paralysis is manifested by loss of the normal blink reflex. Animals cannot protect their eyes and often withdraw their eyeballs into the socket as a reflex because they cannot blink. Facial paralysis can cause drooping of the facial muscles on one side and drooling. There can also be decreased tear production in the eyeball, resulting in dry eye.

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What causes facial paralysis?

In the majority of cases, an underlying cause is not identified (idiopathic facial paralysis). Facial paralysis has been linked with low thyroid level. In some cases, facial paralysis is seen concurrently with problems in the vestibular system (system of balance). This may reflect a problem in the inner ear or in the brain.

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If the problem is inside the brain, possible causes include cancer, infection, inflammation, and stroke. There are usually additional neurologic signs in animals with brain disease (i.e. difficulty walking, change in level of alertness, abnormalities with other cranial nerves).

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How is facial paralysis diagnosed?

A full neurological exam is necessary to determine whether the symptoms reflect a problem inside or outside the brain. If the problem is thought to be inside the brain, an MRI +/- spinal fluid analysis is recommended. If the problem is thought to be outside of the brain, ruling out hypothyroidism is recommended. Tear production is usually checked to determine whether the eye needs to be lubricated.



How is facial paralysis treated?

Treatment for facial paralysis depends on the underlying cause. Animals with idiopathic facial paralysis typically improve over a period of weeks.

Lubrication of the eye is important to prevent dry eye and corneal ulceration.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis for idiopathic facial paralysis is good. Most animals will recover over a period of weeks. Some dogs do not recover completely. It is not uncommon for dogs with idiopathic facial paralysis to have facial paralysis on the same side or the opposite side months to years later.

Prognosis for the other diseases that cause facial paralysis is variable.

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