

Frequently Asked Questions – Lymphoid Follicular Conjunctivitis/Giant Papillary Conjunctivitis

What is Lymphoid follicular conjunctivitis (LFC)? LFC is a common form of hypersensitivity reaction (eye allergy) in dogs. The conjunctiva is the pink tissue lining the eyelids and third eyelids where lymphoid follicles are located. Normally, they are tiny, transparent follicles and are important for local ocular immunity. However, exposure to an environmental antigen (allergen) may result in stimulation of the immune system causing excessive amounts and enlargement of these lymphoid follicles. When present in excess, or when they become enlarged, they can cause irritation.

My dog is older, why is he/she just now developing allergies? Although LFC occurs most frequently in young animals, ocular allergies can develop at any age, similar to other allergies. When conjunctival lymphoid tissue is exposed to environmental allergens over the course of months to years, the immune system may become hyper-sensitized to the allergen and cause an over-active response to the allergen. The immune system causes inflammation in these tissues and may recruit mast cells which release histamine, resulting in further inflammation.

What clinical signs might I notice in my pet? It is important to understand that LFC can affect one eye or both at the same time. Typical clinical signs include ocular redness, excessive tearing, squinting, rubbing, a mucoid discharge, and third eyelid elevation with or without swelling.

What kind of treatment is needed for LFC? Treatment depends largely on the severity of clinical signs and the patient's response to LFC. Treatment may consist of a combination of topical steroidal or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory eye drops, immunosuppressive eye drops, anti-histamine eye drops, and in severe cases, oral anti-inflammatory medications may be warranted. The eye drops will need to be administered 2 to 4 times a day.

The medication directions say until gone. How long will I need to treat? Generally, the initial treatment lasts 4-6 weeks. If the patient responds well and clinical signs do not return following treatment, no further treatment may be necessary. If clinical signs do return upon completion of treatment, or if there is only minimal improvement with treatment, other treatments may be necessary. This may include different medication combinations and/or longer treatment times. Since environmental allergens may include pollens, plant material, molds, dust mites, etc. or a combination of multiple allergens, determining exactly which allergens are involved may be impossible. It is important to be aware that your pet may require long term treatment with eye drops to control clinical signs. However, some patients may only require treatment seasonally, and treatments may differ for every patient.

Should I get my pet allergy tested? Although LFC can often occur with atopic dermatitis (skin allergies), it may also occur independent of skin allergies. LFC is never correlated with food allergies. Since allergens are widely variable and even patients that undergo skin testing and allergy desensitization treatment can still require topical treatment for LFC, we do not recommend pursuing allergy skin testing for ocular allergies alone. If your pet suffers from skin allergies (atopy), we strongly recommend working with your regular veterinarian regarding treatment for allergic skin disease. Common medications used to treat atopy such as Apoquel and Cytopoint, and oral anti-histamines, like Benadryl, Zyrtec and Claritin may help with ocular allergies, however topical treatment will still be needed to treat LFC. In patients with Dry Eye, oral anti-histamines should be used with caution and may be contraindicated.