

ISSUE #5 • WINTER 2011

# Behavior Bytes

The Newsletter from Dr. Sophia Yin for the Animal Care Professional

Dear Colleagues:

We soared through our 2011 inaugural year, and now we're excited to present a new year of newsletters filled with fun, informative tips and behavioral techniques. Our first newsletter of 2012 is all about the eye. Whether you're medicating eyes or helping to prevent specific eye issues, you'll see how understanding behavior can help us improve our pets' everyday health.

Enjoy!



Dr. Sophia Yin, DVM, MS

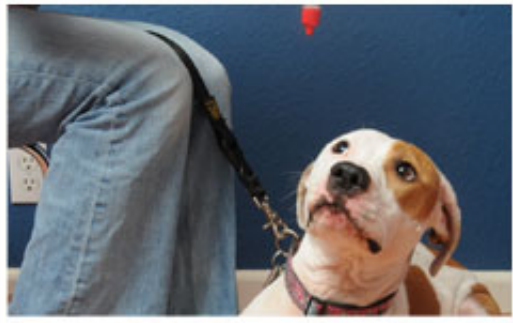
## STEP-BY-STEP SOLUTIONS

### How to Get Eye Drops in the Eye (Instead of on the Face) – A Quick Training Program

If you wear contacts, eye drops are a fact of life that you quickly get used to. But when it's your pet that needs the daily drops, the situation can quickly turn sour. You might start out with a dog you can

strong-arm into accepting treatment... but you're likely to end up with a dog who heads south as soon as she sees the bottle or whenever she suspects you're trying to trick her.

Here's one way to train dogs to hold still and enjoy receiving drops in their eyes.



If your dog already associates the bottle with the drops that she dislikes, we'll have to start by first training her to associate the bottle with good things.



**Step 1:** Place something tasty on the eye drop bottle. You can use canned cheese, peanut butter, cream cheese, or some other pasty substance that will stick to the bottle.



Let the dog lick the treat off. It's best to spread it flat and thin, so the dog has to lick repeatedly to get it off instead of sucking up the entire treat with one quick roll of the tongue.



**Repeat Step 1:** As she's finishing the treat, remove the bottle out of her reach. The goal is that when she sees you holding the bottle, she waits expectantly to get a treat. Her eyes should see the bottle while her mind is thinking, "Yum, treat."



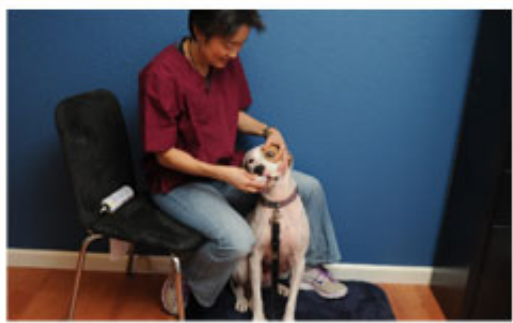
When you present the bottle to her, she should immediately lick the treat.



**Step 2:** Once she's consistently happy to see the eye drop bottle, practice pairing food with handling her face in whichever way you will end up needing to handle her to administer the eye drops. Here, I touch the side of the dog's face while she gets treats. Start out by handling her just enough that she still feels comfortable enough to keep eating. Then systematically handle her in ways that are increasingly closer to your ultimate goal.

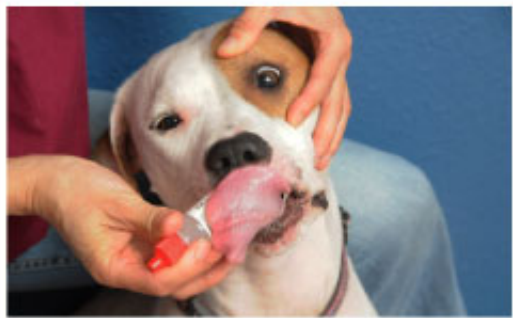


As she's finishing the treat, and before she gets tired of you touching her face, remove the bottle and see if she looks like she still wants more before you repeat this step. (Note: you can give treats independently of the bottle too).



**Step 3:** In this step, I've moved on to actually parting the dog's eyelids while letting her lick the treat off the bottle.

When giving eye drops you may need to part the lids



pretty widely. Notice that this dog only cares about the treat. She's making a good association between the handling and the food.



**Step 4a, Method 1:** At some point, if you are doing this by yourself, you will need a few seconds where you are positioning the bottle and the dog is not getting the treat. Work toward this by quickly moving the bottle to the medication position.



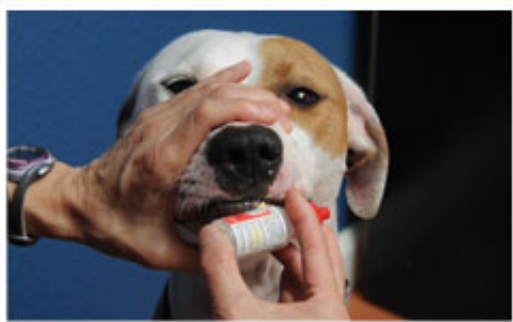
Before the dog starts to wriggle, put the treat-smeared bottle back in front of her mouth. Keep switching back and forth, systematically increasing the length of time that you hold the bottle above her eye. When you're consistently able to hold the bottle above her head for 3-5 seconds you can administer drops and then hurry and follow with treats.



**Step 4b, Method 2:** Alternatively, you can have an assistant give the treats.



Once the dog is eating the treat, you can administer the meds.



**Different positioning.** You may also opt to train the dog for different positioning. For instance, here I hold her muzzle while giving her treats.



As with method 1 for giving the drops, I then practice holding the bottle right over her eye, but will bring it back to treat position before she starts to struggle.



**Training dogs to accept hands balancing on their faces.** I tend to need to balance my hand on the dog for stability when giving eye drops. To train the dog for this, you can give treats while you practice balancing your hand on her muzzle, head, or side of the face.



In this case, I'm giving long semi-moist treats and holding them in such a way that she can only nibble off a little bit at a time as she works her way up the treat.



You can see in this shot how I have to balance my arm along her face in order to aim the dropper bottle.

This process may seem like it requires a lot of steps, but if you progress in a systematic manner, for some dogs you may get through in just minutes. Other dogs will need several five- to ten-minute sessions a day for a week or two. You can also work towards the goal carrying out the entire procedure and only giving a reward at the end. In any case if you follow the process detailed here, your dog will appreciate the time and learn to love a procedure she once hated.

amongst all the dogs. After 10 seconds of pulling, the IOP was measured in both eyes and the tension on the leash removed. One minute later the IOP was measured again. At least five minutes elapsed between trials, in order to allow IOP to return to baseline. For each dog three measures were taken—pre-tension IOP, IOP 10 seconds post-pulling, and IOP 1 minute post-pulling.

Intraocular pressure increased significantly (51.6% increase) by an average of 7.4 mmHg when dogs were wearing a collar, and insignificantly (by 15.8%) by an average of 2.3 mmHg when dogs were wearing a harness. Older dogs tended to have greater increases in intraocular pressure, but the increase was not significant. Dogs of breeds bred for sled pulling (Alaskan Malamute, Alaskan Husky) tended to have less IOP change compared to dogs that, while trained for pulling, were not sled dog breeds (American Staffordshire Terrier, Cocker Spaniel). This difference in breed was not statistically significant.

While this increase in IOP may not cause issues in dogs with normal healthy eyes, it may create a problem for dogs already prone to glaucoma, weak or thin corneas, or any condition for which an increase in IOP might be harmful. The authors conclude that such dogs should wear harnesses instead of collars in order to avoid potentially harmful pressure around their necks. Other options include training these dogs to wear a head halter such as a Snootloop® or Gentle Leader®, or using positive reinforcement to train them to walk on a loose leash consistently and to avoid pulling when they are excited. Owners of such dogs should avoid choke chains and pinch collars, as well as any training techniques that involve creating pressure around their pets' necks.

**Reference:**

Paul, A. M., Bentley, E., Diehl, K. A., & Miller, P. E. (2006). Effects of the Application of Neck Pressure by a Collar or Harness on Intraocular Pressure in Dogs. *J Am Anim Hosp Assoc*, (42), 207–211.