



STARGAZING / FLY-CATCHING SYNDROME

What is stargazing / fly-catching syndrome?

This is an uncommon subset of clinical signs, mostly consisting of sudden onset of occasional or constant episodes in which dogs seem to be watching something and then suddenly snap at it, often in association with jumping, licking, lip-smacking or swallowing behaviours. This can occur in dogs of any breed or age.

What causes it?

The syndrome is poorly understood and there are several possible theories to cause these episodes. The episodes may represent one or a combination of these problems, which may include:

- + Behavioural disorders, such as stereotypy or obsessive-compulsive disorder.
- + Ocular problems, mostly associated with possible debris within the eye (vitreous opacity problems).
- + Neurological structural disease, causing visual anomalies/hallucinations, because of cortical hyperactivity or complex partial seizures.
- + Gastrointestinal disorders, such as dietary allergies, gastroesophageal reflux, causing a presentation similar to Sandifer syndrome in humans.

Are there any other clinical signs?

Other possible clinical signs will likely be related to the underlying cause. With ocular problems, structural eye problems such as inflammation may be observed. As for neurological causes, other abnormalities may be observed during examination. Gastrointestinal diseases may also show signs at home such as vomiting or diarrhoea or may show abnormalities during clinical examination.

Stargazing/Fly catching syndrome may be challenging to evaluate and these patients may benefit from specialist examination.

How do we investigate it?

Considering the wide variety of causes associated with this syndrome, a complete neurological, medical, and ophthalmological evaluation is recommended. After a complete clinical examination, then other investigations may include blood tests, imaging of the brain, ocular examination and gut evaluation; these may vary depending on the presentation of the patient. Occasionally, if all tests are negative, then a Behavioural evaluation will be recommended.

At Southfields, we are lucky to have a multidisciplinary team that can complete ophthalmologic, neurologic and gastrointestinal examination and

investigations by the top specialists in the field.

What treatment is required?

There is an array of described treatments for this syndrome, which may widely vary depend on the patient's clinical signs and investigation findings. These may include diet changes (to specific diets), gut protecting medications, steroid medications, anti-epileptic drugs or even behaviour modification medications. These patients would benefit from the guidance of an experienced specialist to advise what the best treatment course is.

What is the prognosis?

The prognosis will depend on the underlying cause. However, studies suggest that if the underlying cause is defined and appropriate treatment is started, then the episodes may subside or resolve. Therefore, a correct selection of investigations by an experienced specialist will help reaching the best treatment options for each individual patient.

Your primary veterinary surgeon and veterinary neurologist will be able to discuss in more detail with you should pet develop signs of Stargazing/Fly catching syndrome.



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