



# ACVO Vision for Animals Foundation

THE ACVO® VISION FOR

ANIMALS FOUNDATION

In 2001, with the support and sponsorship of the ACVO®, the ACVO® Vision for Animals Foundation (VAF) was established to support research leading to the elimination of ocular diseases causing vision loss and suffering in animals. The VAF is a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization, which strives to realize its mission by funding animal eye disease research conducted by qualified animal health care professionals and research scientists. The VAF is funded exclusively through tax deductible donations from private individuals such as concerned animal owners, industry supporters, and Diplomates of the ACVO®. More information can be found at [www.visionforanimals.org](http://www.visionforanimals.org)



*The ACVO® is continually involved in basic and clinical research developing new diagnostic procedures and treatment regimens. The genetics committee of the ACVO® works closely with breeders to better define and help eliminate inherited ocular diseases. The name of a Diplomate closest to you may be obtained from a general practitioner in your area or on-line at:*

**[www.ACVO.org](http://www.ACVO.org)**

*For information about our free eye exams for Service Dogs, visit:*

**[www.ACVOeyeexam.org](http://www.ACVOeyeexam.org)**



**SUDDEN ACQUIRED**

**RETINAL DEGENERATION**

**SYNDROME**

**{ SARDS }**



## UNDERSTANDING SARDS

Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS) is a frustrating disease for both owners and veterinary ophthalmologists. As the name implies vision loss occurs rapidly. Beyond this clinical sign, veterinary ophthalmologists know little about this disease or its causes. Ophthalmic examination, including the retina, is initially normal in SARDS patients. Frequently, re-examination several months later may show evidence of retinal degeneration.

Vision occurs when light passes through the eye to stimulate the retina. The retina (located at the back of the eye) converts the light into an electrical signal that is sent to the brain through the optic nerve, where it is interpreted as vision. We can measure the electrical activity of the retina by electroretinography. An electroretinogram is a diagnostic test where several small, non-painful electrodes are attached to the patient. After a period of dark-adaptation, a bright light is flashed into the eye. A normal retina will produce an organized pattern of electrical activity indicative of retinal function. In SARDS patients this organized pattern is absent. This absence of retinal activity is characteristic for SARDS.

***Even though there is no cure for SARDS, a full evaluation of the patient is important because there are treatable causes of vision loss that should be differentiated from non-treatable causes.***

## WHAT CAUSES SARDS?

Historically, SARDS tends to occur more commonly in middle-aged and older dogs. Vision loss is often preceded by a history of increases in water consumption, urination, appetite and weight. These changes vary between patients. There are numerous reports of a stressful event occurring just prior to the onset of clinical signs. There are a number of theories regarding the cause of SARDS. To date there has been no confirmed association between SARDS and diet, environment, medications, genetics or systemic disease.

## DIAGNOSING SARDS

When confronted with a potential SARDS patient, veterinary ophthalmologists will obtain a thorough history. A complete ocular examination will be performed. Depending on the patient and the discretion of the ophthalmologist, additional diagnostic tests may be recommended including: Complete Blood Count, serum biochemistry, and an electroretinogram. Even though there is no cure for SARDS, a full evaluation of the patient is important because there are treatable causes of vision loss that should be differentiated from non-treatable causes.

## TREATING SARDS

Currently, there is no good therapy for SARDS and the prognosis for restoring vision is poor. Research is being done to identify the cause (or causes) of SARDS, develop therapy and possible prevention. Fortunately, SARDS is not a painful disease. Affected patients are blind, but are able to have a good quality of life. Some training may be needed to help the patient adjust to and function in a world without vision. Veterinary ophthalmologists can provide owners with information that will help them and their pet in their adjustment to vision loss.

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