**Background and Causes of Tear Staining**

**Most veterinary eye specialists believe the actual cause of staining is excess tearing. When the face hair is wet from excess tearing it is the breeding ground for bacteria and yeast. One of the most common yeast infections is Ptyrosporin or Red Yeast which causes a deep reddish-brown stain. Low grade bacterial infections in the tear ducts are also common and may cause excess tearing and staining. Eliminating excess tearing is one of the best ways to stop staining. Prevent hair from falling into the eyes which causes irritation and infection. Maltese can be susceptible to allergies so watch the environment your Maltese is in.**

**Genetics plays a role in excessive tearing and staining. Like most everyone with more than one Maltese, some do and some do not tear stain. Many veterinary eye specialists believe that the actual structure around the eye area plays a significant role in excessive tearing. Maltese that are shown in outdoor areas are picking up dirt and pollen can be susceptible to allergies as well as pet owners that walk them on grass and dirt.**  **The pressure of a teething pup or excess tartar on the teeth or other various teeth problems will cause tear staining.**

**Maltese owners whose dogs previously had sparkling white faces have overnight watched tear staining occur from clogged tear ducts from the dirt and debris of the show ring. When in a hotel room with a friend who smoked, it has been noted it also was a cause of tear staining. Yeast infections in the ears may also be a frequent culprit of tearing. It also is important to be extra careful when bathing you Maltese. Shampoo and other chemicals in the eyes can cause irritation and excess tearing.**

**If your Maltese drinks from a water dish make it of the stainless steel or ceramic variety. If your local water has a high mineral content you may find the entire face and beard stained. If such a problem as this, having them drink from a water bottle will keep their faces dry and/or they can be placed on purified or commercial bottled water.**

**Diet can play a key role in tear staining. A dry kibble that is natural with no additives, preservatives or food color in it seems to aid in maintaining white stain free faces. Before a Maltese owner attempts to remove the tear staining from a dog’s face it is most important to have eliminated the source of the staining. Once the source of excessive tearing and staining is found a pro-active program to remove the staining can begin. After trying to ensure you have remedied the cause of the irritations causing the excessive tearing, you can begin to think about removing the tear staining. Dealing with yeast and bacterial infections is next. Talk with your veterinarian about putting your Maltese on a round of antibiotics. There are many over the counter remedies that have been successful, but if it is a case of a dental problem, there are antibiotics that will target these things.** **Tetracycline has been shown to cause teeth which have not erupted to permanently stain yellow, so care must be taken on which product to use. An eye ointment used in conjunction with the antibiotics prescribed has been known to help keep the tear ducts flowing from clogged debris.**

**Removing Tear Staining**

**If you have decided to attempt to remove tear staining from the facial hair, there are a number of products available from the dog products suppliers at shows or through mail order catalogs that can be used on the facial hair on a daily basis.**

**The following are various methods that will help to remove tear staining once you get the tearing under control. Care must be taken in using these products or any other chemical solutions so as not to get anything in the dog’s eyes. Stay in a well ventilated area. It is also important to remember that when attempting to remove tear staining you also are damaging the hair. Before and after bleaching make sure I condition the hair well first. Make sure you neutralize the effects of the chemicals you have used and condition the facial hair after all attempts to remove stain.**

**1) Milk of Magnesia, corn starch and peroxide (20 volume to 40 volume) — make a good paste of this and put on the stained area until it dries or some let dry overnight. Wash out, CONDITION WELL. Keep doing this for several days until tear staining is gone, although I would recommend skipping a day or two between applications if possible.**

**2) Crowne Royale makes a product called “WHITNER” — mix the powder with peroxide (20 volume to 40 volume) into a paste and leave on until the level of lightening has occurred.**

**3) Human hair bleach — there are many products but that being said, Sally’s carries a Quick White super strength powder lightener in which you add liquid developer. They carry a 30 Volume developer called sensitive scalp crème which has been used with success. Human hair bleaches are very harsh and can do damage so conditioning well afterwards and on a daily basis is important. I cannot stress enough how this can cause blindness, do not put close to the eyes or nostrils.**

**Don’t be impatient. If you have a face that is badly stained it may take several bleachings to bring the color back up to white. Do it several days apart and in between CONDITION every day.**

Submitted by T.M. Meyer