

Living with a Blind Pet

There are many reasons that your pet may lose vision in one or both eyes during their lifetime. Although vision loss can seem devastating to us, it is important to remember that pets process a lot of information through their senses of smell and hearing. In some pets, vision loss is a gradual process, and it is not uncommon for pet owners to not realize how visually impaired their pet is until there is a change in their environment. When vision loss is sudden the symptoms are much more obvious to owners, but these pets can also adapt quite well to blindness with time and patience.



Home Environment:

Maintaining a consistent environment for your blind pet is very important and allows your pet to become accustomed to their surroundings without having to see them. Modifying your pet's environment in a safe manner can allow your blind pet more freedom and independence.

- ❑ **Furniture:** Try not to rearrange your furniture. Maintaining a consistent layout in your home will help your pet to develop a walking path to avoid colliding with objects. If furniture needs to be relocated, it is best to be done gradually over several days to allow your pet to adapt to the new walking paths. Your pet can learn to jump up on furniture, but they may require assistance to learn this skill.
- ❑ **Stairs:** Falling down stairs can be a significant danger for blind pets. Blocking off stairs with baby gates initially is a great idea. When stairs cannot be avoided, the use of a harness for support and guidance is beneficial.

Your pet may be able to learn to navigate stairs over time, but initially it is best to keep them off limits.

- ❑ **Food/water/beds:** The location of your pet's food, water, and bed should not change. These areas should be thought of as a "home base" for your pet. If your pet needs to be picked up, they should be returned to "home base" to help them reorient themselves.

Outside Exercise:

Daily exercise outside is a vital part of a healthy lifestyle for your blind pet. It is important to remember to be watchful of potential dangers as your pet will rely on you to help them avoid these dangers.

- ❑ **Harness:** Walking your pet on a harness can be a great way to keep them under control and

protected from danger. Blind pets can be less predictable in their movements, so having a harness with a handle on the top can help prevent an accident.

- ❑ **Fenced in areas:** Most pets can learn to navigate a fenced-in area without assistance. It is important to fence off areas like pools or

ponds that can be a fall hazard. Using different textures like bark chips or gravel will help mark hazard areas like trees or bushes.

- ❑ **Vocabulary:** Teaching your pet some basic words can help improve their ability to navigate their environment. Make a list of words: “step-up/down”, “left/right”, “slow”, “stop”, etc.

Helpful Tips:

#1 Avoid picking up your blind pet: Although it is often quicker and easier for us, picking up your blind pet up can be quite disorienting. It is important to let your pet learn to navigate around their home environment. If you must pick up your pet, make sure to put them down at a “home base” so they can reorient themselves quickly.

#2 Keep you blind dog on a leash: Some blind pets can be quite adventurous even when they have lost vision. They can easily fall into a pool or pond or take off down a trail following a scent. A long extender leash can offer your pet more freedom while keeping them safe.

#3 Use different scents to mark areas for your blind pet: You can use different scents like flavored extracts, scented candles, or a potpourri sachet to mark rooms or reference points for your blind pet. Be careful not to overwhelm the environment with too many scents.

#4 Teach your pet a “caution” word: Teaching your pet a caution word such as “stop” or “sit” can literally save your pet’s life in an emergency. A reliable caution word that your pet will respond to can help to avoid painful injuries or falls. Wearing a pet “halo device” can help prevent your pet from bumping into hard surfaces.

#5 Warn people that your pet is blind: It is important to teach people to speak to your blind pet before approaching or touching your pet. This is especially important to teach children. Vests or bandanas identifying your pet as visually impaired can help warn people as they approach your blind pet. People or animals unexpectedly approaching your blind pet quickly can be startling and can elicit a “negative” reaction from your pet.

Have more questions?

Please do not hesitate to contact the Animal Vision Center at (425) 307-6020 to let us know if you have any further questions or concerns about medications or your pet’s eyes.

