



Living With A Blind Dog Fact Sheet

This advice sheet is a very brief introduction to living with a blind dog and we advise you use as many other resources of information as possible (see over for some useful references and links).

Some of the most common causes of blindness in dogs include:

- Cataracts
- Glaucoma
- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration (SARD)
- Retinal Detachment
- Tumours (which may necessitate removal of the eye or eyes)
- Optic neuritis (inflammation of the optic nerve)

Some of these are treatable, but unfortunately some are not and may lead to sudden or gradual onset blindness. Dogs vary in how they react to becoming blind. As a general rule, older, smaller dogs often cope better with blindness than young, large and boisterous dogs.

However, every dog is different, and many owners are pleasantly surprised at how well their pet copes. There are many things that you as an owner of a blind dog can do to make their adaptation to blindness easier.

Environmental factors.

Most blind dogs will form an excellent mental map of their environment and you can help this by initially restricting their access to a small area of the house and garden until they are comfortable with negotiating this, then gradually extend this area. This is particularly important if your dog has become suddenly blind or is moved to a new home.

- Do not move items of furniture around and remove potentially hazardous objects that he/she may bump into
- Leave food and water bowls in the same place
- Leave the TV or radio on when your dog is left alone (these act as an auditory cue to allow them to orientate themselves within the house)
- Place scent or tactile clues to aid orientation around the house (eg place mats at the entrances to rooms – they will learn to feel these under their feet so that they know where they are)
- Consider lighting levels. Dogs with early signs of PRA often function better in bright light. If your dog has been diagnosed with PRA then leave the lights on to help them negotiate their surroundings

Training Factors.

Having lost sight, your blind dog needs to develop new skills and confidence and you can assist this by training. Consider contacting an experienced dog trainer or behaviourist or consult the references below. Important components of training blind dogs include:

- Positive reinforcement to increase their confidence
- Increasing their repertoire of auditory commands
- Training aids. Concentrate on objects with different textures and smells to maximise these existing senses
- Stimulate their other senses. This can be achieved by setting aside time (for example, each evening) for a 'cuddle' or massage.

References

Textbook: Caroline D. Levin. Living With Blind Dogs.
Second Edition, Lantern Publications (ISBN 09672253)

Websites:

<http://www.blinddogs.com>

<http://www.blinddog.info/blinddoghelp.htm>

<http://www.petplace.com/dogs/living-with-a-blind-dog/page1.aspx>

Davies Veterinary Specialists, Manor Farm Business Park, Higham Gobion, Herts SG5 3HR 01582 853878

©2018 Davies Veterinary Specialists Limited