



Living with a Blind dog

Advice on helping your pet adapt if they have recently lost their sight.

Adapting to caring for a blind dog can seem overwhelming and may require some significant changes to your daily routine. Every dog is different, but many owners are pleasantly surprised at how well their pet copes. There are many things that you can do to make their lives easier and more fun.

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

- Cataracts
- Glaucoma
- Traumatic Injuries
- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS)
- Retinal Detachment
- Tumours (which may necessitate removal of the eye or eyes)
- Optic neuritis (inflammation of the optic nerve)
- Chorioretinitis (inflammation of the layers at the back of the eye)

Environmental Factors

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

If restricting access is not possible, guiding them on lead around an unfamiliar environment can help.

How you can help your blind dog adapt to the home environment:

- Limit movement of furniture and remove potentially hazardous objects that they may bump into.
- Leave food/water bowls in the same place and consider a water fountain so that they can hear the location.
- 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 location cues to aid orientation around the house (e.g. place mats at the entrances to rooms – they will learn to feel these under their feet so that they know where they are). Remember dogs have a keener sense of smell than us so only a little of each scent is needed and can be refreshed every 1-2 weeks.



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How you can help your blind dog adapt to the home environment continued

- 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.
- On walks be aware of potential dangers (low hanging branches, trees, roads, railways, waterways) and help your pet to avoid them. Also, be aware of approaching dogs, many of the social cues for initial interaction between dogs are visual and will be missed by your dog.

Training Factors

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

Important considerations when training blind dogs include:

- Positive reinforcement to increase their confidence.
- Increasing their repertoire of auditory commands: left, right, step up, step down, stop, wait, all-clear (or other release command for safe areas), go steady, settle.
- Reducing stress by familiarising them with handling similar to in an eye examination, use pheromone devices such as DAP collars or other stress reducing devices such as thunder shirts.
- Making others aware that your dog is blind – harnesses, leads, bandanas are all available online.
- Introducing objects with different textures, sounds and smells to maximise these existing senses. Attaching bells to your shoes or the collar of another pet and play with noise-making toys.
- Stimulating their other senses. This can be achieved by setting aside time (for example, each evening) for a 'cuddle' or massage.
- Encouraging groomers to leave the whiskers around their eyes and chin long can help them to detect objects sooner. For dogs prone to collisions, a device such as a 'halo' could be considered and for dogs with prominent eyes protection from Doggles or Optivisors might be necessary. Some dogs resent such aids initially and may take time and positive rewarding to acclimatise.



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References

Useful forums/ websites:

<https://www.blinddogsupport.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/BlindDogSupport/>

<http://www.blinddogs.net/>

<https://www.bdruk.org/caring>

Many owners
are pleasantly
surprised at how
well their pet
copes

Products for Blind Dogs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odrUv3vcA6U>

<https://doggles.uk.com/doggles-hints-tips.html>

<https://www.thundershirt.co.uk/>

Please note: Davies have no financial interest in the products listed above.

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