



Dogs Living with Blindness

Blindness in dogs can be caused by a variety of factors including ageing (for example cataracts), genetic conditions (for example retinal degeneration), injury, disease (for example Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome) or illness. Although blindness can be a challenging condition for dog owners, with proper care, blind dogs can lead happy, fulfilling lives.

How to Care for a Blind Dog

Although a blind dog cannot see, they rely on other senses—particularly hearing and smell—to navigate the world around them. Here are some important considerations and strategies for caring for a blind dog:

1. Create a Safe, Predictable Environment

- **Keep Furniture in the Same Place:** To help your dog navigate safely, keep furniture and other household items in consistent positions. This creates a predictable environment, which helps the dog feel more secure.
- **Create a Quiet Space:** Provide a calm, quiet area where your dog can retreat. A comfortable bed or crate with their favourite blankets or toys can help them feel safe and reset.
- **Avoid Stairs and Slippery Floors:** If possible, keep your dog away from stairs or other dangerous areas. Consider using ramps or gates with rugs to prevent accidents.

2. Training and Guidance

- **Use Verbal Cues and Sound Signals:** Use verbal cues, clicks, or sounds to guide your dog. Dogs rely heavily on their sense of hearing, so consistent cues can help them understand what's expected.
- **Use Positive Reinforcement:** Reward your dog for confidently navigating spaces or learning new commands. Positive reinforcement encourages confidence and trust in their environment.

3. Health and Hygiene

- **Regular Vet Check-ups:** Keep up with regular veterinary visits to monitor your dog's health and to address any other underlying medical conditions that could be affecting their vision. Many dogs with blindness also have other health issues that require attention.
- **Eye Health Maintenance:** For dogs with conditions like cataracts or glaucoma, your vet may recommend eye drops or other treatments to manage symptoms. Be sure to follow the treatment plan as prescribed.
- **Dental Health:** Blind dogs often rely on their sense of smell to find food and navigate their surroundings, so maintaining good oral hygiene is important.





4. Exercise and Enrichment

- **Lead Walks with Caution:** Take your dog on regular walks but be mindful of their surroundings. Use a lead ideally attached to a harness to guide them and help them avoid obstacles. Some dogs can still go off lead with supervision.
- **Use of bells:** Attaching a bell to your shoe could be a simple and effective way to help your dog keep track of your movements, especially if they are off-lead. You could also **attach a bell to other pets** in the house so the sound of the bell would create a consistent auditory cue that your dog can learn to associate with their presence, helping them know where the other pets are.
- **Interactive Toys:** Consider using toys that stimulate other senses, such as toys with sound (e.g., squeaky balls, bells, or crinkly toys). This can help keep your dog mentally stimulated and engaged.
- **Puzzle Games:** Scent-based games and puzzles that challenge their sense of smell can help enrich your dog's life and keep their mind active.
- **Consider Calming Products:** Products like pheromone diffusers may help reduce anxiety in some blind dogs.

5. Use of the Web and Book Resources

- **Internet:** this an invaluable resource, including YouTube videos for dog training. Websites and online resources are constantly evolving, so accessing them through a browser ensures you're getting the most recent and relevant content available.
- **Books:**
 - Living with blind dogs. Caroline D Levin. ISBN 0-9672253-4-5, Lantern Publications, 1998, 2003
 - Blind dog stories. Caroline D Levin. ISBN: 0967225310, Lantern Publications, 1999

Signs That Your Blind Dog Needs Veterinary Attention

- **Increased Disorientation:** If your dog becomes more disoriented or seems confused, it could indicate a problem that requires attention.
- **Pain or Irritation:** If your dog shows signs of pain, excessive squinting, or unusual eye discharge, this may indicate an underlying eye condition that needs to be addressed.
- **Change in Appetite or Behaviour:** A sudden loss of appetite or changes in behaviour could suggest a medical issue affecting your dog's health beyond their blindness.

