

# Living With Blindness

### Maximize your pet's other senses

Animals are incredibly adaptable and can learn to live with blindness while maintaining a very good quality of life. Vision is just one of the five senses that your dog might possess. When vision is impaired, the other senses become sharper as they are used more, especially the senses of smell and hearing.

Learn to talk to your dog often, using your voice to guide them. Talk to them as you approach so they know where you are and what speed you are approaching at. Teach them simple commands so that they can respond to you quickly. Praise lavishly when manoeuvres are carried out successfully. Negative reinforcement should not be used as the dog may already be nervous.

The dog may be guided by scent, such as oil-based scents or citrus. Hazards may be designated one scent, whereas dog-friendly zones may be designated another.

Consider attaching a bell to your shoe when going for a walk. Then when your dog is off the lead, they will be able to listen for you and find you.



### Activity and diet management

Remember not to overindulge your animal with extra food because they have a disability. Being overweight can cause several other problems such as arthritis, heart disease and diabetes. Your dog may be less active when visually impaired, and therefore food needs to be cut back accordingly. Treats do make a very good training aid and should be given as part of the daily food allowance, rather than as extra.



### Environmental modifications

Ideally, the arrangement of furniture in the home should not be changed. A dog can have a map in their head of the layout of familiar places. Moving objects frequently would cause them to bump into things and lose some confidence.

Keep your pet's bed, water bowl and feeding bowl in the same place. If your dog gets disorientated, put them in their bed or at their feed bowl so that they can realise where they are and re-orient themselves.

There are toys available which have been designed for blind dogs. Balls which contain a bell or scented toys can be the most useful. However, remember that if your animal did not play with toys before becoming blind, it is unlikely that they will start afterwards. There are several such toys on the market, such as tennis balls containing bells, giggle balls, boingo balls, jingle balls, scented ropes etc.



## Time for training

It takes a varying length of time for an animal to learn how to navigate and carry out certain tasks, but most learn in a matter of days to weeks. Training can help your dog become accustomed to the lifestyle changes which are inevitable, using their senses of hearing and smell.



It is best to have patience and allow them to try to complete certain tasks themselves. For example, let them negotiate flights of stairs without carrying them, as they will learn very quickly how best to perform the task. Treats may be needed initially to give them incentive to climb or descend the steps. While your dog is learning this task, you may need a barrier at the top of the stairs to stop them from falling.

## Helpful resources

### Books

Living with blind dogs. Caroline D Levin.

A Resource Book and Training Guide for the Owners of Blind and Low-Vision Dogs

Includes causes of blindness, pack/behavior issues, training tips, new skills, negotiating the house, yard, and community, toys/games & more.

ISBN 0-9672253-4-5, Lantern Publications, 1998, 2003

Blind dog stories. Caroline D Levin.

Tales of Triumph, Humor, and Heroism

Two-dozen short stories that provide encouragement to dog owners, demonstrate blind-dog quality of life, and celebrate the human-canine bond.

ISBN: 0967225310, Lantern Publications, 1999.



### DVD

New skills for blind dogs. A Companion Film to Living with Blind Dogs

Discusses training theory and equipment. Demonstrates skills such as the Wait, the Go Slowly, and the Come when called; teaching dogs directional cues and avoiding obstacles on leash; managing steps and stairs. Includes footage from actual blind-dog training sessions. A Lantern Publications film

### Websites

The internet can be a very helpful resource to guide you further. These are ever changing, so if you simply use your preferred web browser you will get the most up to date links.