

# Helping Your Pet Cope with Vision Loss

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## Vision loss in animals

There are many causes of vision loss in animals, some are treatable and some are not. Untreatable conditions include most retinal diseases, some forms of glaucoma, severe uncontrolled inflammatory diseases and head trauma cases. In cases with gradual onset vision loss, it is usually easier for a pet to adapt to than for sudden onset vision loss. As long as the condition leading to blindness is not painful, most pets adapt quite well with time and compensate by memorizing the layout of their environment and navigate using touch, hearing and smell. Vision is probably not as important to the quality of life for pets as compared to humans as they don't drive, read, watch TV or care about appearances. A good quality of life can still be obtained through such things as attention from their owner, outside exercise/walks, food and olfactory stimuli, although not necessarily in that order for all pets!

## What can I do to help my pet adapt?

Use verbal cues when around your pet for its reassurance.

Keep your pet's environment as familiar as possible. If your pet lives indoors, avoid moving the furniture too frequently. If you have to move house during your pet's remaining lifespan or if your pet has suddenly gone blind, start them off in just a couple of rooms and gradually increase the size of their environment as they adapt. Scented oils and perfumes can be rubbed on the corners of furniture to assist in learning a modified environment. Some dogs respond well to crate training as this allows them to have a small secure space to relax in.

For outdoor pets keep the garden areas free of dangerous objects such as low, sharp branches on plants, thorny bushes and unexpected obstacles like garden tools, pots, rubbish bins etc. Take care with access to swimming pools, steep drops or roads.

When walking your dog, stick to a few familiar routes so they feel more comfortable with the smells, surrounds and terrain.

If your pet likes to chase/retrieve balls and toys, get one with a bell or other sound making device to aid tracking its path. Hiding food treats inside suitable toys will also help stimulate your pet and increase its interest in such games.

Often a blind pet will become more reliant on any other pets and putting a bell on other pets' collars will help locate them. If you do not have another pet you might want to consider getting a sighted companion, particularly for dogs, but bear in mind compatibility is not assured.

More information and some inspirational stories can be found at various sites on the internet.

## What special precautions should I take?

It is recommended you monitor your pet's eyes for development of any other problems like inflammation or pressure elevation. Observe for pain, increased redness, discharge, discomfort, clouding, or any other significant changes. If you are concerned, have your pet checked by a veterinarian.

Caution is needed if small children and blind pets are to coexist. Children need to be taught how to use their voice when approaching a blind pet to avoid startling it. Bear in mind a blind pet may be at higher risk of biting a child than if it was visual, particularly if it is at all nervous, and keeping the pet under those circumstances may be unwise.