

Caring for a blind dog



Caring for a blind dog isn't that different from caring for a dog who can see, but there are some things that you can do to make life a little safer and more interesting. No matter how it seems or feels right now, your dog's blindness is much harder on you than it is on them. Dogs perceive the world primarily through their nose, followed by the eyes and then the ears.

This is very different from our human way of eyes, ears and then nose. This leads us to struggle with the concept of irreversible blindness. Our pets pick up easily on our own feelings and emotions.

Eye protection

Your dog will no longer be able to protect their eyes from shrubs/twigs/sand/bushes etc when outside as they cannot see any offending objects. Consider investing in 'Doggles' or 'Halos' which are available to prevent your dog bumping in to things when in a strange place. These can be found online with a simple search. It is important to remember that your dog will need to get used to wearing eye protection, so start by putting them on your dog for short periods of time and use treats to reward him/her.

Commands and training

Start teaching your dog 'help words' such as 'STOP' - 'STEP UP' - 'STEP DOWN' - 'SLOWLY' - 'CAREFUL' - 'RIGHT' - 'LEFT' - 'DANGER' etc. Just start to say the words and they will quickly associate that word with the action or feeling they then perform.

If you want a blind dog to step down from a small step for instance, tap on the floor so that they can judge the distance by sound and then introduce a cue word such as 'STEP DOWN'.

Hearing your voice is soothing, so talk to your dog often. Let them know when you are walking out of a room, so they can hear your voice get quieter as you walk away. Even just some 'silly chatter' can be enjoyable relaxing for them to know that you are around.

Remember to speak to your dog when you are approaching to touch (especially whilst sleeping) to prevent startling them. They will often pick up on small vibrations from the floor as you are moving towards them, but add in sound as you approach them too.

Stimulation and play

If your dog loved to play with a ball before they became blind, you can continue to do this. Try using a scented tennis ball to stimulate their sense of smell, or scent your own tennis ball by rubbing it with your hands which will place your scent on the ball.

Consider using balls which make noises when you throw them, or ones with bells in them to stimulate your dog's sense of hearing.

When throwing balls, allow it to bounce close enough for your dog to follow the sound or the vibrations

from the floor. You will be amazed how a dog can track the scent and sound of a ball moving over the ground.

Teach your dog new things to make life even more fun. Try clicker training - a great training tool and confidence builder.

There are many treat toys on the market which will allow your dog to play with a toy whilst dispensing treats. These are good for rewarding your pet whilst they are having fun.



01928 714040
admin@eye-vet.co.uk
www.eye-vet.co.uk

Safety and environment

- Keep things such as your pet's bed, food and water bowls in the same place will allow them to find them using memory. Your pet will remember the location of such important items from before they became blind
- It is important to keep furniture in the house in the same place too, as your pet will remember the lay out of rooms, such as the placing of a sofa or chair and will be better at navigating from memory.
- Leave a TV or radio playing softly near the pet's bed. The sound is soothing and may help prevent excess barking or separation anxiety. It also helps them to orient themselves if the sound is always coming from the same place.
- If you have a smaller dog, avoid picking him/her up. They need to learn on their own and actually become very confused when picked up or put down as they lose their sense of orientation.
- Get down on the floor and crawl around at your dog's eye level to find anything which may be dangerous. Do the same in your garden. Look out for low branches etc that could poke the eyes. Corners of coffee tables are particularly hazardous in the home, as are furniture legs or sharp protruding objects.
- If you have young children, they need to understand that things are now different their dog. Consider having them put on a blindfold and crawl around so that they can understand how different life is for their canine friend now they are blind. Explanation is the key.
- Some dog's can become withdrawn or depressed when they first go blind, especially in cases of sudden onset blindness. Try to keep their routine as normal as possible. If they loved their morning walks, continue to take them.
- If your dog wears a collar for walking, now might be a good time to try a harness. You will have more control of your dog's body, with less pressure to the neck and eyes which is important in dog's with glaucoma.
- Use a baby gate to block stairs until your dog has learned to master them.
- Teach stairs by placing a treat on every step or two. Stand in front of the dog, holding the collar or harness and gently encourage him/her (without pulling). Practice until he/she is able to navigate them smoothly.
- A wind chime near the back door can be helpful to your dog by guiding him/her back to this door once they have been outside to toilet. Door mats at all outside door entrances are also very helpful as they will feel the change in texture under their feet and know they are at the door.
- Socialisation is important – especially for blind puppies. Continue to socialise your dog to prevent them developing new fears. When your dog is out socialising, let people know they he/she is blind so that strangers don't reach out and touch them unexpectedly. There are 'I'm blind' leads and harnesses available on the market which will help inform strangers before they approach your dog.
- If boarding your dog in kennels, make a special sign to have added to their kennel saying 'I'm blind' to make sure everybody knows your dog is blind.

