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# How to **MANAGE** your Blind Pet

MAKING LIFE HAPPY, HEALTHY, & FULFILLING

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People largely use visual cues as one of the most important senses we have to give us information about our environment. Similarly, although motion detection, color vision as well as acuity varies amongst species, we surmise that animals also depend heavily on visual cues to gather information about their immediate surroundings. Your veterinarian plays an integral role in early detection of potentially painful or vision-threatening diseases. The good news is that many ocular diseases of pets can be medically treated or managed to provide ophthalmic comfort and avoid blindness. However, despite great strides in veterinary ophthalmology, some diagnoses culminate in complete vision loss despite medical or surgical intervention. Animals can be blind from birth, or develop ocular disease that is blinding later in life. Fortunately, the majority of our pet population can acclimate well to loss of the visual sense, particularly when it is gradual in onset. Acute onset blindness often requires greater aid on a pet owner's behalf to help an animal adjust to a more limited set of sensory input.

Even in sighted animals, they rely much more heavily on their sense of smell and hearing than people do in order to assess the environment around them. Appeal to these senses to help your blind pet adapt to vision loss. Utilize automatic scent dispensers to lay-out a "smell map" of the house, picking different fragrances for different rooms and keeping individual

fragrances constant for that space. Commercially available scented adhesive buttons can be applied to sharp furniture edges, doorways, the legs of tables, or other objects that your pet may commonly run into. Refrain from rearranging furniture within the household. Place a small bell on the collar of any other animals in the household to alert your blind pet to their presence or approach. Provide plenty of toys that squeak, or make crumpling sounds for enrichment.

Ensure that the safety of your blind pet is first and foremost. All blind pets should readily respond to verbal commands, and this should be coupled with the clicker training technique to positively capture desired behavior. When changing your home to improve your pet's safety, consider changes you would make while baby-proofing a house. Pools or ponds should be fenced and locked. If fencing is not a possibility, place an encircling, rough "warning" texture around the large body of water (e.g. bed of rocks, mulch, or sand) that will alert your pet that they're close to the edge. Baby gates should be placed at the top of all staircases. Obtain a leash and collar that states that your



pet is blind. Always speak softly prior to touching any blind animal to alert them of your presence, and inform friends and visitors to do the same.

Active, energetic dogs that frequently traumatize their face and eyes on objects that they run into, can be fitted with vests that have an integrated soft tubing that encircles their head and serves as a bumper. Continue to take your dog on walks, to the dog park, or on car rides. Most importantly, encourage independence! With the appropriate support and family care at home, blind animals can live a happy, healthy, fulfilling life.