



Paw Prints

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Columnist

Living with a blind dog

Rover's eyes have been a little cloudy over the past six months and your veterinarian said it's the beginning of cataracts. After all, he is over 10 years old. But recently you've noticed your pooch has been bumping into corners and sometimes having trouble seeing you unless you're right in front of him.

Blindness is a partial or total loss of vision that can be present from birth or happen suddenly due to injury or illness, or gradually because of old age or progressive diseases such as cataracts, retinal degeneration and glaucoma.

Dogs that are losing their vision may appear to be clumsy and even disoriented around the house — frequently tripping, bumping into furniture, and just stumbling around. Your furry friend will have a harder time locating toys and his food bowl if they are not kept in their usual place.

You may notice that Rover may easily startle and act jumpy when you or someone else goes to pet him, since he cannot see as clearly.

Your veterinarian can give your dog an eye exam and, if necessary, recommend a veterinary ophthalmologist who will perform a complete exam.

Living with a blind dog can be challenging. But it can also be a rewarding experience to help your pooch live a happy and comfortable life by taking the time to make him feel more secure in his surroundings and providing a stable, accident-free environment.

You need to understand that Rover's blindness is probably going to be much harder on you than him. Since dogs live "in the moment" your pooch really won't understand what is happening to him. Remember your dog can sense your anxiety and concern in your voice, so try to be patient and talk soothingly to him often to build his confidence. Keep a positive attitude.

The first thing to think about is safety. So if you have stairs in your home, a baby gate is going to become your dog's best friend, especially if he enjoys sleeping upstairs with you.

If you have wooden-type floors, a carpet runner can help your furry friend find his way through the house. A unique touch is to create a "sniff path" by putting air fresheners with different scents in each room to give different areas of the house an identity.

Remember to examine your home at your dog's eye level to make sure there are no hazards, such as sharp edges on furniture. Be sure to cushion any sharp corners throughout your home, such as cabinets or door facings.

Don't move furniture around, because it will make



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

Though he may be blind, with a little care and consideration, he can still lead a good life.

it much more difficult for your blind dog to maneuver around your home. Also keep your floor clear of objects that Rover could bump into or slip on.

If you have other pets in the home, put bells on their collars so your furry friend will be aware of their presence. It's even a good idea to jingle a bell to let him know you're nearby.

Never approach Rover from behind, because this may startle him. And be sure to inform any visitors that stop by that your dog is blind so he has a chance to sniff their hand before they pet him.

Your blind dog will still enjoy walking with you, but his collar should be exchanged for a harness and

his lead should be short to avoid tripping.

To let others know your pooch is blind on your walks, try putting a bandana or vest on him that displays "I'm blind" to alert others of his condition.

One important thing to remember in helping your blind dog is to maintain his routine; go for walks, continue to play with a favorite toy, feed him in the same place and at the same time daily.

There are many ways you can help Rover acclimate to his new situation. Blindness in dogs does not have to spell the end of a quality life. With patience and training, you will be able to enjoy your sightless canine friend's company for many years.



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