**Blindness**

The process of losing sight can be stressful for both the pet owner and the animal as they adjust to blindness. Unfortunately, many conditions may progress to permanent blindness in animals despite our best efforts in achieving prompt diagnosis and providing appropriate medical treatment. Most pets adjust incredibly well to their blindness and can lead a rather normal life, as long as they are pain free. Animals have a much higher sense of smell and hearing than us humans and these are equally important, if not more so than sight to most animals. During the process of vision loss, animals learn to rely more on other senses as they adjust to blindness. Although the time to adjust to blindness is very individual for each pet and owner, here are some tips that you may find helpful during this adjustment period:

1. HOME: Blind animals create a form of mental map of their environment. Thus, keeping your furniture in the same location if possible will help them orient themselves faster. If you do need to move furniture or move homes altogether, do not worry, your pet will still adjust to the new setting. Keeping your pet’s feeding and bedding in a safe location that is of easy access to your pet is also ideal. Adding different scents or textures such as carpets or rugs to areas of your home to help your pet’s navigation and creation of their mental map.
2. PROTECT: Remember that navigating in strange environments will be challenging to your pet until he can become familiarized with his surroundings. Keeping your pet on a leash will help keep them safe and out of harm’s way. Blind animals should not be left unattended around bodies of water, near cliffs, steep drops or busy roads. Consider using safety gates at home to protect them from falling down the stairs or keep them out of unsafe areas.
3. TALK: Some blind pets may become startled or frightened when approached or grabbed unexpectedly. Speaking quietly or normally to these animals before approaching them will help to comfort them. If your pet becomes anxious when alone, speaking to them as you move from one room to another in your home will help comfort them to know where you are or follow you if they wish.
4. LEARNING: Teaching your pet new commands such as “stop”, “step-up” or “step-down” while navigating will help keep your pet safe.
5. PLAYING: Buying toys that make noise will utilize their sense of hearing and allow them to still be playful and have fun! If your pet loves to walk or go swimming, continue to encourage these activities and enable them in any way possible to continue doing what they enjoy!
6. FRIENDS: Other pets in your home can become their guide companions to help your blind pet navigate. Placing a bell on the housemate’s collar may help your pet locate or follow them easily.

Other sources for tips and tricks are: www.blindtails.com or www.blinddogsupport.com