

# Medivet Godstone Referrals

## How to help you pet adjust to blindness

Shannon Gaffaney, RCVS Recognised Advanced Practitioner in Ophthalmology

It can be very distressing to learn that your pet has lost its vision. In many cases, this will be a gradual process, allowing time to make adjustments. For those pets who lose their sight suddenly, it can be quite traumatic, especially in the early weeks of adaptation. Fortunately, most pets will be able to adjust to their 'new reality' with support and guidance from their families and carers.

### **Key things to consider when your pet goes blind are:**

- Your pet's other senses will be heightened. They will be guided by smell, touch and hearing (if this sense is still working in an older patient). You can help them to adapt by creating a safe environment where these other senses are catered for.
- Your pet may be fearful for a while and lose confidence. You can help with the transition by being consistent, work on training aids and interaction to enrich their life experience and take plenty of time to introduce them to any new experiences.
- Some pets will need to fully change their lifestyle for safety.

### **Cats**

A blind cat that normally goes outside is at a great risk of being attacked, getting lost, or being injured by a vehicle. The safest option is to create a secure environment (usually indoors) with enrichment options. Indoor only cats can be very happy.

- Ensure they have plenty of sleeping and hiding spaces.
- They will still want to climb, so provide them with a kitty condo which has safe and easily navigated access.
- Add in small new things for interest and stimulation *after* they have adjusted to their new environment.
- Build a secure outside 'catio' if you have the space.
- Train your cat to walk on a secure harness.
- Be mindful of how visitors or carers may add stress to your cat. Secure your cat in a quiet room when entertaining.
- Keep food and water in the same place.
- Consider adding another litter tray.
- Add scent to create a pathway for your cat to follow in the home (cat nip, pheromone spray).

### **Medivet Godstone Referrals**

Godstone Highway Depot, Oxted Road, Godstone RH9 8BP

01883 744812 [www.medivetgodstonereferrals.co.uk](http://www.medivetgodstonereferrals.co.uk) [referrals.godstone@medivet.co.uk](mailto:referrals.godstone@medivet.co.uk)

## Medivet Godstone Referrals

### Dogs

Embrace your training sessions and play sessions! You can create a rich and happy world for your blind dog with support and patience.

- Keep your blind dog on a lead, especially in public or unfamiliar places.
- Your dog's behaviour may change around other dogs, be attentive to these interactions.
- Buy a harness with clear labelling that your dog is blind.
- Stick to familiar and safe walking routes.
- Verbal commands such as 'stop', 'wait', 'careful' and 'step' as well as clicker training can improve communication and confidence.
- Create a tactile walking surface (mats, rugs) in your home and garden to follow
- Keep furniture, pot plants, and other trip hazards in the same places in the home and garden.
- Be mindful of temporary items placed on the floor (boxes, shopping, toys) which can create trip hazards
- Consider closing off room(s) with a dog gate or shut door(s) when a space cannot be kept safe (guest visiting, redecorating, when no one is home).
- Wear a bell on yourself when out walking with your dog or carry a whistle.
- If you have another visual dog (*that can be trusted!*), put a bell on their collar for your blind dog to follow.
- Consider purchasing a 'halo' anti-collision collar or ring which can be attached to the harness. This is a sort of 'bumper' that will help inform your dog to objects immediately in the path or periphery. Often this can be used in the early training period and then stopped as confidence grows.
- Keep food and water in the same place.
- Use markers (scent, bells) to plot key positions in the home (stair entry, doors)

### Medivet Godstone Referrals

Godstone Highway Depot, Oxted Road, Godstone RH9 8BP

01883 744812 [www.medivetgodstonereferrals.co.uk](http://www.medivetgodstonereferrals.co.uk) [referrals.godstone@medivet.co.uk](mailto:referrals.godstone@medivet.co.uk)