LIVING WITH A BLIND DOG

What is blindness?
Complete blindness is the loss of vision in both eyes. Acute (sudden) blindness occurs when vision is lost in both eyes at the same time. Impaired vision may not be noticed until vision is completely gone in both eyes. It is usually difficult to notice if your pet is only blind in one eye because they will act normally.

What causes blindness?
There are many causes of blindness. Sometimes the loss of vision is acute as in ocular injury, and sometimes the loss of vision is gradual as in the case of degenerative disease processes. Common causes of blindness include:

- Severe corneal disease
- Anterior and/or posterior uveitis
- Cataracts
- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA)
- Retinal inflammation and/or infection
- Retinal detachment or dysplasia
- Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration (SARDS)
- Glaucoma
- Congenital malformations
- Diseases of optic nerve and visual pathways
- Diseases of occipital cortex (the visual center of the brain)

How will I know when my dog goes blind?
Animals are very adaptive and will ‘hide’ the fact that they are unable to see. Things to watch for include:

- Occasional clumsiness
- Bumping into objects
- Inability to find food and water dishes
- Inattentive behavior
- Excessive sleeping
- Fearful behavior and easily startled
- Loss of normal play or interactive behavior
- Becoming lost in the yard and/or house

If you notice any of these signs, you should arrange to see your veterinarian immediately.
Can blindness be treated?
Diagnostic tests will need to be performed on your pet to determine the exact cause of the blindness. These tests may include: a complete physical exam including blood pressure, a complete ophthalmic exam, a complete neurological exam, blood work including a complete blood count and biochemistry profile, an electroretinogram (ERG), an ocular ultrasound, sampling of the cornea, conjunctival sac, aqueous humour, and vitreous humour, a cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) tap, and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI).
In most cases, blindness is irreversible. If the cause of the blindness can be found, it may be treatable. However, we are often unable to find the exact cause of the blindness and as such, we cannot always successfully treat blindness.

What can I do at home to help my pet?
The following are some suggestions to help your pet adjust to life without sight:
1. If your pet is mostly indoors, try not to rearrange your furniture. They will get used to navigating the house as long as their environment isn’t being constantly changed.
2. If your pet is mostly outdoors, don’t plan any major landscape changes. Again, they will get used to navigating their environment and changes can cause them to become disoriented.
3. If you have a pool or hot tub provide a solid cover and have a barrier present to prevent your pet from falling in.
4. Always walk your pet on a leash and be aware of your surroundings as you are now their eyes.
5. Keep food and water bowls in exactly the same spot and place the bowls on a mat to provide a tactile reminder. They will use this as their reference point for locating all other places in their environment.
6. If they become disoriented take them to their food bowl, this is their reference point for all other locations in their environment.
7. Place a barrier at the top and the bottom of the stairs to prevent falls. Learning to go up and down stairs is the most difficult thing for them to re-learn so be patient with them.
8. Train your family to put things away when they are done with them. Always push your chair back under the table when finished with it. Things left out where they don’t belong will disorient your pet because it changes their environment.
9. Use a good quality perfume to mark important areas. For example, the top and bottom of stairs, sharp corners on tables, etc. Your pet will be relying more on his other senses to accommodate for his lack of sight.
10. Remember that your pet isn’t uncomfortable or sick, and he can have a long and happy life. He doesn’t need to be ‘put down’.

Resources:
http://www.petcarebooks.com/books/living_blind.htm