

FACTSHEET

Caring for cats with vision impairment

There are many different reasons for vision impairment in cats: genetic, eye damage caused by disease or infection, and injury. As long as any underlying causes have been treated by a vet, cats with vision impairment can live happy and healthy lives and adapt very well to living with the impairment.

Vision impaired cats will use their other senses to optimal advantage. They have excellent hearing and sense of smell and will use their whiskers as 'feelers' to help them know where objects are.

Sound is useful in letting your cat know where you are but be aware that sudden and loud noises can be exceptionally frightening for a blind cat. As you go about your home, you might want to hum or talk softly so your cat knows where you are. Never sneak up on your cat or suddenly touch them when they are asleep, always talk softly to them so they know you are there. Avoid stomping and slamming doors as this can startle your cat and cause undue distress as their hearing is often heightened due to their vision being impaired.

Routines such as regular mealtimes are very important: cats are creatures of habit, and all cats prefer predictable patterns in their day. For cats with reduced senses, routines are particularly reassuring, and help them have a sense of autonomy.

If your cat was had normal vision previously, they will have a mental map of where everything is and remember it. Your cat's resources (food, water bowls, litter tray, bed) should not be moved about. If you have a new cat who has vision impairment, you will need to introduce them to where their resources will be kept – these don't need to be in the one place (cats don't like to eat near their toilet, and most cats prefer their water bowl away from their food bowl) but need to always be in the *same* place.

Do not pick up your cat and move them from one place to another – this will disorient them – you can guide them and walk with them to help them navigate their new home. Over time they will develop a map in their mind and know where everything is. It is therefore very important to keep furniture, appliances, etc. in the same place and keep floors free of clutter.

Check your home for any hazards, such as unscreened windows. Always keep the toilet lid closed and take care with water – don't leave a bathtub full, don't leave buckets around etc. Consider your home from your cat's level and be mindful of risks such as falls and sharp objects.

Vision impaired cats should be kept strictly indoors or only taken for walks in the garden on a harness. If you have a cat who had previously been able to see and they know their garden well, they can go outside but only when you are with them as they are still vulnerable to risks.

Even though you will be keeping your cat secure at all times, accidental escapes can happen. It's very important that your cat has a collar and tag (which, as well as a contact number should state that the cat is blind) as well as being registered and microchipped.

Like any cat, cats with vision impairment like to play. Use toys that will stimulate their other senses: catnip mice, bell toys and treat balls will provide lots of fun. Many people think blind cats won't know where the toys are, but they will, and they will love to play just as any cat does.

As well as their usual bed, provide some other places for your cat to enjoy sleeping – you could install some cat stairs to a window seat, for example, so your cat can feel the sun and enjoy a breeze (through the securely screened window).

Even though your cat has vision impairment, they will still need to be provided with a scratching post, or two. All cats need to scratch, and your cat will soon learn where the scratchers are and use them. Don't be afraid to get tall scratch towers, as many vision impaired cats will learn to use them and enjoy climbing them.

When you have visitors, be sure to explain your cat's special needs so they don't inadvertently cause stress or harm to your cat. Introduce the visitors to your cat so they can become familiar with the person's scent and voice. Your cat will quickly come to recognise your friends and family.

Caring for a vision impaired cat requires thoughtfulness and continued sensitivity but is very rewarding. Ensuring your cat is safe and feels secure will keep them happy and healthy.

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