

FAQs About Blind Cats

Blindness doesn't have to significantly affect a cat's quality of life. If you provide a safe, stimulating environment, a blind cat can continue to enjoy and remain engaged in life and the world around him or her.

What causes blindness in cats?

Some cats are born without eyes or with very small eyes that do not function. Others lose their sight as a result of illness, physical injury, brain damage or poisoning (including extreme reaction to anesthesia) and conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts or scarring caused by untreated in-turned eyelashes. High blood pressure is the most common cause of blindness in adult cats. A blind eye is often cloudy or the pupil remains dilated even in bright light.

How is a blind cat's behavior different from a sighted cat?

If the loss of sight is gradual, the cat compensates gradually and behavior changes may be slight and not noticeable until the cat is completely blind. Sudden blindness can result in more dramatic behavior changes: The cat is disoriented and hesitant when walking, bumps into things and may vocalize more often. Cats who become blind suddenly may also develop uncharacteristic behaviors until they learn to adapt. They may be unwilling to leave their sleeping area and may develop inappropriate toilet habits because they are unable to find the litter box. They may also be reluctant to explore, can appear withdrawn, and may meow when disoriented or in need of reassurance.

Most blind cats accept and adjust to their disability. They find new ways to navigate in their environment and overcome challenges by using their remaining senses. With a little help from their families, they can have full and happy lives.

How do blind cats navigate in their environment?

Blind cats rely on touch, scent, sound and memory to find their way around. To judge proximity to objects, they use their whiskers a lot more than sighted cats. This means that their whiskers are subjected to more wear and tear than usual, so their whiskers can be broken or even worn down. Some blind cats appear to listen for sound echoes to help them navigate, and some also walk with their tail tip touching the ground as an additional sense organ. Blind cats may climb onto things, rather than jumping, but many also memorize heights and distances. Because they rely on memory to navigate, furniture should not be rearranged and obstructions should not be left on the floor when there is a blind cat in the house.

How do I introduce my adopted blind cat to my home?

Generally, you can use the same method that you would use to settle a sighted cat into your home — starting with one room and expanding this territory over time. For a blind cat, you will need to take extra care that the surroundings

are safe, so progress may be slower. Encouragement, reassurance and rewards are essential.

Start by establishing a main room or "safe room" containing food, water, bedding and a litter box. Spend time in the room with your cat, petting and playing with her and giving special treats. Leaving a radio playing on low volume will also provide comfort. Once your cat gets her bearings in the main room, extend the boundaries of her environment to include other rooms. Supervise these excursions until your cat seems confident. You can use treats to lure your cat into new areas. If you live in a home with multiple floors, temporarily block off the stairs.

Let your cat spend the night in the main room until she is confident and has memorized the layout of your home. To move the cat's main territory from the safe room to a more appropriate area, duplicate the contents of the safe room (food, water, bedding and litter box) to transition the cat to a preferred area of the house.

How do I introduce other pets to my blind cat?

Just as you would with any new pet, you'll want to introduce your blind cat slowly to other pets in the household. You can initially separate them using a baby gate or a crate, or introduce them on harness and leash until you are sure that they are comfortable with each other. Sighted pets often know that something is different about a blind cat, and many will take on the role of a "seeing-eye friend."

How do I play with my blind cat?

Toys that make sounds, give off scents or contain treats are enjoyable to a blind cat. Be creative. Noisy toys such as balls with bells in them or something as simple as a scrunched-up paper bag will provide stimulation. Many blind cats learn how to dribble paper balls or jingly toys across a room.

How can I train my blind cat?

By using positive reinforcement training, you can develop your blind cat's remaining abilities and create plenty of fun activities with the use of scent and sound. Clicker training is a simple training method that uses a clicking sound as a reward marker to tell your pet when she has gotten it right. Clicker training fits in nicely with a blind cat's listening skills.

TIPS FOR ADOPTERS OF BLIND CATS

To keep your blind cat happy and safe:

- Use identification: Microchip your cat and have her wear an ID tag with "blind cat" noted on it.
- Attach a Cat Locator pendant to the cat's collar. The pendant emits a tone when the handheld applicator is activated, to help you find your blind cat.
- Don't let her loose outdoors. A blind cat is easily disoriented and should not be allowed to roam outdoors.

- For safe, enjoyable outings, teach your cat to walk with a harness and leash.
 - Construct a cattery to enable your cat to enjoy the outdoors safely.
 - Once you've established spots for your cat's litter box and food and water bowls, don't move them.
 - Blind cats rely on scent and memory to find their way around. They may also memorize heights and distances when jumping. Therefore, keep furniture in the same place and keep the floors clean of clutter.
 - If your cat is prone to bumping into furniture, pad table legs and chair legs with a soft material or bubble wrap.
 - Carrying a blind cat around can be disorienting for her. If you do pick up your cat and carry her about, set her down in a familiar place, such as her feeding or sleeping area.
 - Don't lift a blind cat and put her on a raised surface. She may become disoriented and fall off. (This might not apply if the cat is lifted onto a familiar surface, such as a favorite chair or your bed.)
- Cats use their whiskers to help them feel their way around in narrow spaces, so a blind cat's whiskers should never be trimmed.
 - Block off stairways with baby gates until your cat can navigate them safely.
 - Block off access to windows and balconies.
 - Make sure that your cat is never around candles or open flames.
 - To let your blind cat know when someone is near, attach a small bell to your shoe or pant leg and to the collars of any other pets in the house.
 - Speak to your cat when you enter or leave a room.
 - To avoid startling your cat, speak to her when you are approaching to touch her (especially while she's sleeping).
 - Provide toys that have a squeaking, chirping or crinkling sound, or give catnip toys that your cat can smell.

For more about caring for and training pets, go to bestfriends.org/resources/pet-care

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