



# Guide Dogs for the Blind

## Common Medical Career Change Conditions

### CATARACT

#### What is a cataract?

A cataract is an opacity in the lens of the eye. The lens is normally a clear structure in the pupil. It allows light into the eye and focuses that light on the retina.

#### What causes a cataract?

Cataracts can form for several reasons. Breed typical, or hereditary cataracts, can be present at birth (congenital cataract) or form during the first year of life (juvenile cataracts). These are the most common types of cataracts found either during the puppy exams or ophthalmologist exams prior to training, and generally do not affect a dog's life as a pet.

Atypical cataracts can develop due to an injury to the eye, form later in life (age-related), or be a result of certain diseases, such as diabetes.

#### Does a cataract affect a dog's vision?

The degree to which a cataract will affect a dog's vision depends on the size and location of the cataract. Very small cataracts may cause a small blind spot in the dog's vision, but will not impact a pet dog's lifestyle. Small cataracts may or may not progress to larger cataracts during the dog's life. Larger cataracts will obscure more of the dog's visual field, and can cause blindness if both eyes are affected.

#### What other impact can cataracts have on a dog's health?

Cataracts can cause inflammation in the eye. Inflammation in the eye can also lead to glaucoma (elevated pressures in the eye). Symptoms such as increased redness on the whites of the eyes (the sclera) or squinting are possible signs of eye inflammation or pain. If these signs are observed it is important for a dog to be seen by a veterinarian. Breed typical cataracts usually do not cause secondary inflammation in the eye.

#### What treatment is needed for a cataract?

If a cataract is very small, typically treatment is not needed. Often we recommend having small cataracts rechecked by a veterinary Ophthalmologist who can then recommend how often the cataract should be monitored. For larger cataracts surgery is available, and a veterinary Ophthalmologist can remove the cataract. If inflammation or glaucoma develops, medical treatments are used to manage these conditions.

Dog Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Cataract observed in \_\_\_\_\_ eye(s) Cataract Size: \_\_\_\_\_

Breed typical Cataract: \_\_\_\_\_ Atypical Cataract \_\_\_\_\_

Any treatment currently needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Next recheck with veterinary Ophthalmologist recommended: \_\_\_\_\_

## GRADE 1 PATELLAR LUXATION

### What is patellar luxation?

The patella is a small bone often called the “knee cap”. Normally the patella sits in a groove in the knee joint, moving up and down as the back limbs bend and straighten. If the groove or anatomy of the knee joint is not ideal, the patella can move sideways outside of the normal groove. This is an abnormal position for the patella called patellar luxation.

For more information about patellar luxation and grading, please visit the American College of Veterinary Surgeons (ACVS) website: [acvs.org/small-animal/patellar-luxations](https://acvs.org/small-animal/patellar-luxations)

### How does patellar luxation impact a dog's health?

Repetitive abnormal side-to-side movement or luxation of the patella can lead to arthritis of the knee joint over time. The muscles of the affected limb can also experience strain from trying to stabilize patella against luxation. The degree to which arthritis and muscle strain occur is greatly influenced by the grade of the patellar luxation and the dog's lifestyle.

### Is surgery needed for patellar luxation?

Surgery is not recommended for Grade 1 Patellar Luxation. Surgical recommendations for Grades 2, 3, & 4 Patellar Luxation vary depending on the frequency and severity of luxation.

### What lifestyle is recommended for a dog with patellar luxation?

Lifestyle is very important for helping to prevent arthritis and muscle strain in a dog with patellar luxation. It is crucial for the dog to maintain a lean body condition throughout his/her life, because being overweight strongly predisposes a dog to arthritis. Regularly performing exercises to strengthen the muscles of the rear is highly recommended. Keeping these muscles toned can help stabilize the patella and decrease the risk of injury.

### Exercise can include:

1. Sit to stand - On a walk practice this regular behavior training. To increase difficulty perform on a slight incline or hill
2. Stepping over poles – Place 2-3 poles on the ground (half the dog's body length apart), and use the leash to encourage the dog to walk over them without stepping on the poles
3. Walking backwards – while on leash position the dog between you and a wall (to create a “chute”). Place a toy or small treat into a corner. Encourage and reward the dog for taking a few steps backwards

These exercises can be performed daily for 2 weeks then tapered down to 2-3 times a week. If the dog becomes sore from doing these exercise please discuss this with your regular veterinarian.

Dog Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Patellar luxation observed in \_\_\_\_\_ stifles (knees)

## HIP DYSPLASIA

### What is a hip dysplasia?

The hip joint is a “ball and socket” type joint. The round head of the femur bone is the “ball” and part of the pelvic bone called the acetabulum is cup shaped, acting like a “socket”. In the normal hip joint there is a smooth, close fit between these two parts. In some dogs, the bones of the hip joint do not grow to achieve this ideal fit. This type of abnormal hip joint development is called hip dysplasia.

### How does hip dysplasia impact a dog’s health?

Most young dogs with hip dysplasia do not show any symptoms. Occasionally, even young dogs with hip dysplasia can show signs of hip discomfort or muscle strain, because the hip muscles may have increased effort to stabilize the hips.

As dogs with hip dysplasia walk and exercise over their lifetime, the poor fit of the hips causes an increased risk of developing arthritis. Arthritis is the most common reason for mature or geriatric dogs with hip dysplasia to show signs of discomfort. Signs of hip discomfort can include reluctance to exercise, difficulty rising or laying down, difficulty with stairs, or “bunny hopping” while running.

### Will surgery be needed for a dog with hip dysplasia?

The vast majority of dogs with hip dysplasia will not need surgery. Rarely, surgery may be indicated in a young adult dog if he is already showing significant lameness due to severe hip dysplasia. Total hip replacement is sometimes recommended for elderly dogs that have developed severe arthritis due to hip dysplasia. However, given this is a major surgical procedure it is reserved for cases where the potential benefit of the surgery greatly outweighs the recovery time, risks, and potential complications.

### What lifestyle and treatments are recommended for hip dysplasia?

Lifestyle is very important for helping to prevent arthritis and muscle strain in a dog with hip dysplasia. Maintaining a lean body weight throughout the dog’s life is the most important factor in helping to decrease arthritis formation and the symptoms of hip dysplasia. Also, low-impact exercise is recommended for joint health, such as leash-walking and muscle strengthening exercises.

#### Exercise can include:

1. Sit to stand - On a walk practice this regular behavior training. To increase difficulty perform on a slight incline or hill
2. Stepping over poles – Place 2-3 poles on the ground (half the dog’s body length apart), and use the leash to encourage the dog to walk over them without stepping on the poles
3. Walking backwards – while on leash position the dog between you and a wall (to create a “chute”). Place a toy or small treat into a corner. Encourage and reward the dog for taking a few steps backwards

These exercises can be performed daily for 2 weeks then tapered down to 2-3 times a week. If the dog becomes sore from doing these exercises please discuss this with your regular veterinarian.

If signs of hip discomfort develop (see the symptoms described above), there are a variety of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, pain medications, and joint supplements available for treating the symptoms of arthritis. It is important to only give medications at the recommendation of a veterinarian and to give medications specifically designed for dogs.

Dog Name: \_\_\_\_\_

ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Hip Dysplasia observed in \_\_\_\_\_ hip(s)

## **TRACHEAL SENSITIVITY**

### **What is tracheal sensitivity?**

The trachea is the “windpipe” connecting the nose and mouth to the lungs. Tracheal sensitivity is identified when mild to moderate pressure from a normal neck collar causes a dog to cough. Some dogs with tracheal sensitivity will also start to cough when they are very excited. The cough is typically described as sounding dry, harsh, or “honking”.

### **What causes tracheal sensitivity?**

Tracheal sensitivity can be seen when a dog gets a respiratory infection, commonly called kennel cough. This type of coughing and tracheal sensitivity typically resolves in a few days to weeks. Some dogs, however, cough with tracheal pressure without ever having a respiratory infection, or continue to cough long after the respiratory infection has resolved. If the trachea is sensitive, walking on a neck collar can cause a dog to cough.

### **Why is a dog with tracheal sensitivity career changed?**

A guide dog must be able to work wearing both a harness and a neck collar. If a dog has tracheal sensitivity, he may have the urge to cough while working. Regularly coughing can be distracting to the dog, and takes his attention away from safely focusing on guide work. Additionally, this might draw concern about the dog’s health while working or traveling in public places.

### **What care does a dog with tracheal sensitivity need?**

The most important part of caring for a dog with tracheal sensitivity is to avoid walking the dog on a neck collar or slip leash whenever possible. The less often pressure is applied to the trachea, the less likely the dog is to cough. Causing a dog with tracheal sensitivity to frequently cough by using a neck collar can lead to inflammation and irritation in the trachea, which then in turn can make the trachea more sensitive. This is why walking on a dog with tracheal sensitivity on a gentle leader or chest harness is HIGHLY recommended. Wearing a neck collar for identification tag purpose only is typically not a problem.

### **Does a dog with tracheal sensitivity need any special veterinary care?**

With use of a gentle leader or chest harness, dogs with tracheal sensitivity typically cough infrequently, or only when pressure is accidentally applied to the neck. For these dogs no special veterinary care is needed. If the dog develops a more frequent cough, or if the coughing changes from its typical sound, then it is important to have the dog seen by a veterinarian.

Dog Name: \_\_\_\_\_

ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

## ALLERGIES

### What are canine allergies?

An allergy is an over-reaction of the immune system to a substance, or allergen. In dogs there are three typical types of allergies: 1) flea saliva allergy, 2) food allergies, and 3) environmental allergies (such as grasses, weeds, dust mites, etc.). Dogs can have allergies to one or more categories, and just like people, their allergy sensitivities may change as they age.

### What are the symptoms of allergies?

Allergies in dogs will typically cause itchiness of the skin, ears, and paws. Symptoms can include excessive licking, scratching, hair loss, and redness of the skin. Allergies also make a dog more susceptible to skin and ear infections. Some dogs with food allergies may also experience diarrhea and vomiting.

### What treatment is available for allergies?

As with people, allergies are a condition that is managed rather than cured. The amount of treatment and management that is needed depends on the type and severity of the individual dog's allergies. The most effective way to manage allergies is to prevent exposure to the allergen. If this is not possible, as in the case of some environmental allergies, then several options of oral and topical medications are available to decrease itching and help prevent skin or ear infections. Your veterinarian will tailor a management plan to your dog's individual needs, but here are some general recommendations for managing a dog with allergies:

- It is very important to use effective flea control every month on ALL the pets in the house to prevent flea bites.
- If food allergies are suspected, your veterinarian may suggest a hypoallergenic dog food trial. If the dog's allergy symptoms improve, then it may be recommended to continue feeding a hypoallergenic dog food long-term.
- If the allergy symptoms are mild or only occur seasonally, your veterinarian may prescribe anti-allergy medications, ear cleaners, and medicated shampoos to use as needed for symptomatic relief and prevention of infections.
- If the allergy symptoms are persistent despite the above treatments and recommendations, your veterinarian may recommend referral to a veterinary dermatologist for allergy testing and desensitization injections (immunotherapy)

### What should I consider when adopting a dog with allergies?

A dog with allergies can make a wonderful part of the family; however, he/she does need someone willing to be proactive about allergy management. At a minimum this means year-round flea prevention and regularly monitoring the condition of the skin, ears, and paws. For some dogs this may also mean feeding a specific diet, regular bathing, or giving anti-allergy medications. Working with your veterinarian to prevent allergy symptoms is important in preventing secondary skin and ear infections, and helping to keep your dog happy and healthy.

Dog Name: \_\_\_\_\_ ID Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Current allergy treatments: \_\_\_\_\_