

When this high-energy canine developed cataracts and glaucoma at the age of seven, an integrative treatment approach, including acupressure-massage, helped her adjust to blindness.

Before: Tilley at one year of age.

By Amy Snow and Nancy Zidonis

TILLEY'S tale

- HOW A SENIOR DOG ADAPTED TO BEING BLIND

As they age, dogs are subject to a variety of eye problems that can affect their vision and even cause blindness. Often, what concerns their humans most is how these dogs are going to adapt to being blind. As Tilley's case reveals, dogs are incredibly resilient and quickly learn to rely on their other senses to help them acclimatize to vision loss.

Tilley's story

Tilley was a "Humane Society Special", or at least that's what we tell her. Along with her litter mates, she was found in a dumpster somewhere in Oklahoma. The Humane Society in our area of Colorado has a high adoption rate, so lovely puppies often are sent there.

We thought Tilley was mostly Corgi, but her legs kept growing and we realized she was a delightful mix of many breeds. Because she was a well-mixed mutt, we figured her hybrid vigor would portend a long life of good health.

As a puppy, Tilley was a busy high-energy girl. She was (and still is) highly

food-motivated, which made training her relatively easy. Being able to have fun training her, while keeping her busy mind working, turned out to be important for what was to come.

During the summer that Tilley was seven years old, we noticed a reflective quality in her eyes. At first it wasn't obvious, and we made excuses – e.g. the sun was in her eyes. By the end of the summer, however, it was obvious she had cataracts and it was time to go to the veterinarian.

A diagnosis of cataracts - and glaucoma

Our veterinarian checked Tilley's eyes thoroughly and found she had cataracts that

were impinging on her visual acuity. But the more pressing issue was glaucoma. The vet's concern for Tilley's condition became evident before we even left her office, when she made an appointment with a canine ophthalmologist for the following morning at nine.

The next morning, the ophthalmologist didn't mince words. Between the cataracts and the increasing pressure caused by glaucoma, Tilley would become blind. It was just a matter of time. We began conscientiously administering eyedrops to keep her comfortable. At first, it was two sets of drops two times per day, but this progressed to two sets of drops four times a day.

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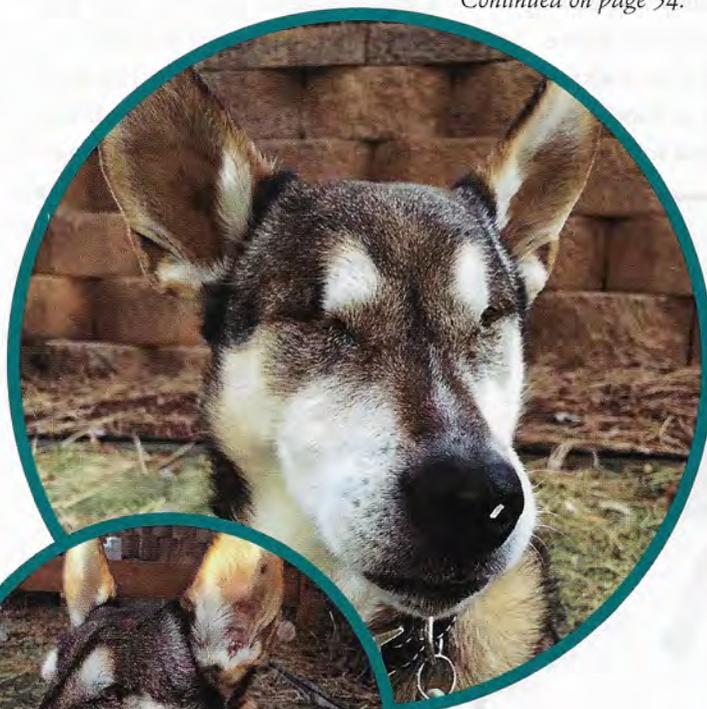
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After: Tilley at nine, after surgery to remove her eyes.

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Acupressure-massage for eye support

During this time, we offered Tilley acupressure-massage sessions to support the health of her eyes. Specific acupressure points and hands-on techniques can help mitigate pain and provide the dog's eyes with life-promoting energy and a sustaining circulation of fluids (see diagram below).

Using an integrative medicine approach, we did our best for as long as we could. Predictably, however, the pressure in Tilley's eyes continued to increase and the cataracts continued to grow. After a year-and-a-half, it was clear that Tilley was pretty much blind. But being a clever girl, she was doing an outstanding job of adapting to her limited vision by depending on her other senses. It was time to have the surgery to remove her eyes. There was no other way left to reduce the pressure and pain she was experiencing.

Tilley's experience versus ours

As the humans in this situation, we were heartbroken, and were projecting our

sense of loss onto Tilley. Thankfully, she was oblivious to our sadness. She was living her life in the moment. We scanned the internet for guidance on how to work with a blind dog. We found a lot of information, which helped us move through our heartbreak and get on board with Tilley's acceptance of reality.

During the first few weeks after her surgery, Tilley bumped into furniture and seemed confused. To help her, we bought a few harnesses and put them around the house so we could find them quickly. These harnesses covered more of her body to give her more sensory security; we attached short leads to them to help her feel a direct connection to being guided. Tilley seemed to welcome our help.

It was interesting. Tilley walked very slowly and cautiously in the house. Yet when we were out on walks, she trooped along either in front of or just behind us, off-lead and sniffing along

Resources for living with a blind dog

[care.com/c/stories/6299/17-tips-for-living-with-a-blind-dog/](https://www.care.com/c/stories/6299/17-tips-for-living-with-a-blind-dog/)

thesprucepets.com/living-with-a-blind-dog-4120134

petcoach.co/article/living-with-a-blind-dog-helpful-tips/

akc.org/expert-advice/health/how-to-help-a-blind-dog/



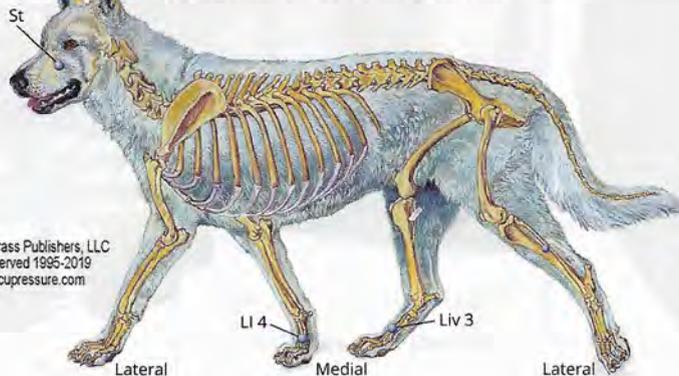
just as she always had. Her confidence on these walks was apparent, and we realized she could feel when she was on different terrains and correct herself more easily than when she was in the maze of the house.

Tilley today

It has been three months since Tilley's surgery, and her ability to adapt to blindness is truly inspiring. Her early training served us all well. She is safe because her "recall" is excellent; she comes on the spot when called. On a walk, when we stop and draw in our feet, she hears us and sits at a heel. She reliably knows the cues for wait, sit and down. Within a week, she learned the word "step" to deal with stairs. She follows us around, listening to our footsteps, and we give her frequent verbal cues.

We would like to believe our beautiful Tilley is super smart and special, but in truth, all dogs have the capacity to adjust to being blind with a little help from their guardians. Dogs are realists and do a far better job of adapting to their circumstance than we do. We can learn a lot from them!

Acupoints to Support Eye Health



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Points	Location
LI 4	Between the first and 2nd metacarpal bones, on the medialside of the 2nd metacarpal.
St 2	Below St 1, in depression at the center of the infraorbital opening.
Liv 3	Above Liv 2, between 2nd and 3rd metatarsal bones at the junction of the metatarsophalangeal joint.