

## Cataract Surgery Dilemma

**Blind dogs can live happy lives, but surgery can restore sight, making it a bit easier on dog and owner.**

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Q. I have a 10-year-old male Bichon Frise, Willie. He has lost his vision in his right eye due to cataracts and is beginning to lose vision in his left eye. Other than his sight, he is in good health. I have seen an ophthalmologist regarding his vision, and she recommended cataract surgery. According to what I have been reading, there is a 90 to 95 percent success rate in canine cataract surgery. Since Willie is a Bichon Frise, he has a higher risk factor of retinal detachment. The success rate for his breed is around 70 percent. I have been struggling to decide if I am making the right decision by opting for surgery. My biggest concern is that the surgery will cause him to become blind prematurely. Of course, if he doesn't have the surgery he will eventually be totally blind, however, he would have a chance to adjust to it more gradually. The other factor that I am concerned about is glaucoma. He can also get glaucoma as a result of the surgery. My question to you is, with all of the risk factors involved, do you feel as though cataract surgery is right thing to do? I want my dog to live the rest of his life as a happy, healthy pet.

A. You do have a challenging decision to make. On one hand, if you do not have the surgery done, Willie will eventually go blind. However, with a 70-percent success rate, there is a possibility of complications, that could cause worse problems.

Cataracts are a gradual solidifying of the lens in the eye, which prevents light from passing through. It is usually a breed-related genetic condition, but can also be the result of diseases like diabetes.

One thing to consider is that cataracts are not a painful condition, and blind dogs can live quite fulfilling lives, just as people do. I believe Willie can live a "happy dog life" without being able to see, if he is otherwise healthy. Dogs rely greatly on their ears and nose for sensory input, compared to people.

However, successful surgery could provide for good vision for the rest of Willie's life, but there are risks with the surgery that could make things worse.

You may want to get a second opinion from another ophthalmologist. Good luck with this difficult decision.

Best, Jon Geller, DVM

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