

SUDDEN ACQUIRED RETINAL DEGENERATION

Sudden Acquired Retinal Degeneration Syndrome (SARDS) is a bizarre syndrome in dogs. Most patients become blind very suddenly, usually in a matter of days to weeks. There is no known cause of the disease and unfortunately, there is no known treatment. Middle-aged to older dogs are affected and there is an increased incidence in females. Fundic examination is normal in the early stages and the diagnosis is confirmed via an electroretinogram (ERG), which tests retinal function. Patients with SARDS have a flat ERG, indicating lack of retinal function.

Many patients will have a recent history of increased drinking, urination, eating and weight gain. These signs hint at a hormonal disorder called Cushing's disease. If your pet is demonstrating these clinical signs, we will recommend further testing with your regular veterinarian.

Your pet should adjust to his/her blindness with time. He/she may appear confused initially because most patients that suddenly become blind seem upset at first with loss of vision. However, his/her other senses such as hearing and smell will help him/her lead a very happy life with a little time and help from you. Blind pets learn to quickly negotiate their territory with ease without bumping into objects. You should help him/her out by keeping his/her environment as stable as possible. Furniture should not be moved and his/her food and water bowls should remain in the same position. You should try to educate any small children about your pet's blindness so that they will approach him/her without startling him/her. You and any guests or children should "announce" your presence so that your pet knows you're there. Your pet can exercise normally but you should always be there to supervise, especially when he/she is in unfamiliar surroundings. A fenced back yard or exercise area is perfectly acceptable. With a little guidance from you, his/her "seeing" eye person, your pet should live a perfectly happy life. Dogs don't seem to have the psychological problems that humans have with blindness so you should not feel any guilt about continuing your relationship with your best friend!