



# Countryside Animal Hospital

PAW Prints

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## Progressive Retinal Atrophy: A Leading Cause of Blindness

**P**rogressive retinal atrophy (PRA) is an inherited eye disease in dogs and cats. With PRA, the cells in the retina begin to atrophy, or deteriorate, usually in early adulthood. The condition is not painful and typically begins with a decreased ability to see at night, progressing eventually to total blindness.



Among the dog breeds most susceptible are Poodles, Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Australian Cattle Dogs, Cocker Spaniels, Schnauzers and Shetland Sheepdogs. Cat breeds include Persians, Siamese and Abyssinians.

Affected cats and dogs may become nervous at night, bump into things in dimly lit rooms, or be hesitant to climb or descend stairs. Pet owners may notice that their dog's or cat's eyes have become reflective when light shines on them and they may have more dilated pupils than normal. There may also be cataract formation.

Early signs of PRA may be overlooked since the progression of the disease is slow and animals tend to adapt well to vision loss. In fact, some pets go undetected until there is a change in their environment. Fortunately, blindness is not as debilitating for pets as it is for humans; the senses of smell and hearing are much more highly developed in pets than they are in people.

We first diagnose PRA with an eye exam focusing on the retina, and we may then need an electroretinography test to confirm. There is no cure available, but you can help your pet avoid injury and make them feel safe at home.

Strategies involve providing extra lighting while there is still vision left, keeping food, water and litterboxes in the same place, keeping furniture in the same spot, and guiding them with a leash when outdoors.

It is also important to talk to your pet to give them reassurance and to let them know where you are. Most cats and dogs adapt well to vision loss and can still have good quality of life.

## Fact or Myth? Blindness and Deafness in White Cats

**P**eople have long believed that white cats—especially those with blue eyes—will eventually become blind and deaf. The good news is that white cats are not more predisposed to becoming blind than any other cat. Blindness in cats may be due to genetic defects, diseases, infections or injuries; however, it is not related to eye or fur color.

It is not a myth that white cats are more likely to become deaf, and deafness is more prevalent in cats with at least one blue eye. Around 20% of white cats with non-blue eyes are born deaf, but the percentage rises to 40% in cats with one blue eye, upwards to as high as 85% of all-white cats with two blue eyes. Some white cats are deaf in only one ear, especially if they have only one blue eye.

It should be easy to determine if your kitty is totally deaf since they won't react to sounds as most cats would. Unless they are facing you, they won't respond to your voice. Fortunately, as long as you take precautions for their safety and comfort, deaf cats do well. Of course, they should never be allowed outdoors because many of their natural cues to danger are auditory.



Let them know when you enter or leave a room by throwing a toy in their direction, touching them gently, creating a vibration, or using a flashlight in the dark. Facial expressions and hand gestures are the best way to communicate. Your non-hearing furball will also need lots of playtime and petting to increase your bond.

## Stress and Disease How Cortisol Affects Your Pet's Health

**J**ust as uncomfortable situations can cause stress for people, it can have a similar effect on pets—especially with repeated exposure to the same unpleasant stimuli. This can include noises, new routines, new people, the absence of a "pack member," boredom, or loneliness.

As with humans, stress increases the levels of cortisol in the blood to prepare your dog or cat for its natural "fight or flight" response. Unfortunately, prolonged periods of heightened cortisol levels can take a toll, causing elevated blood pressure that can lead to cardiovascular disease and elevated blood sugar leading to diabetes.

Excess cortisol can also disrupt the functioning of the immune system, triggering maladies such as asthma, arthritis, skin conditions, allergic responses, and imbalances in normal bacteria levels leading to infections. Addison's disease and Cushing's disease are other conditions related to cortisol imbalances. Other illnesses exacerbated by stress can include kidney disease, colitis, and hemorrhagic gastroenteritis—an acute illness characterized by bloody diarrhea.

Call us if your pet seems stressed and exhibits any of these symptoms:

- 🐾 Vomiting
- 🐾 Diarrhea
- 🐾 Loss of appetite
- 🐾 Skin reactions
- 🐾 Housetraining accidents
- 🐾 Excessive barking or meowing
- 🐾 Irritability or nervousness
- 🐾 Depression
- 🐾 Sudden destructive or aggressive behavior

Be watchful for the signs of stress whenever changes occur in your pet's life. Our PAW (Pet Annual Wellness) Plans make it easy to monitor your pet's health with regular checkups. In addition, reduce stress by providing a consistent routine, plenty of exercise and lots of companionship.

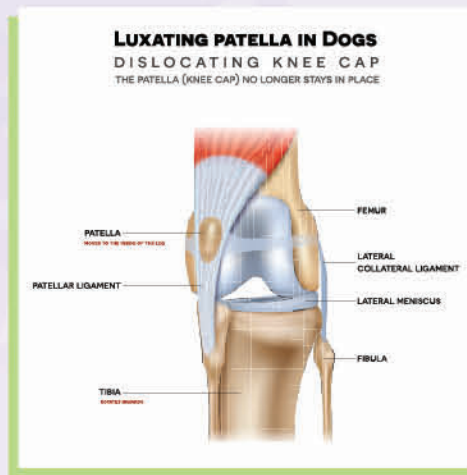
## Luxating Patella: A Common Knee Problem in Toy Breeds

**A** dog's knee joint has many working parts, which means there's a lot that can go wrong. One of the most common knee problems in dogs is luxating patella, also called a "floating" knee cap. This happens when the patella (knee cap) on either or both hind legs moves out of the normal position and drifts or "luxates" toward the inside or outside of the knee.

Although any dog can be affected, the condition is most often seen in toy breeds and luxates to the inside. Luxations to the outside are less common and are most often seen in Newfoundlands. This condition can occur due to an injury; however, it is usually hereditary.

A dog with a luxating patella may appear to limp or skip intermittently. There are four grades of luxation. Dogs usually start with a grade I or II and may never worsen to grade III or IV. Your veterinarian will monitor the condition and will recommend surgery if it progresses to a higher grade. Surgery is the only cure and is usually effective at relieving your dog of chronic pain once the healing process is complete.

The condition can also predispose a dog to a painful ligament rupture, in which case surgery must occur right away. Knee problems can be agonizing for our four-legged friends. Be sure to contact us if your dog is limping or shows other signs of lameness. We can monitor knee problems during checkups. Do you have a PAW (Pet Annual Wellness) Plan for your dog? Ask us how they make checkups and other routine care more affordable!



**Call us at (480) 775-9966 today to make an appointment!**



# The Risks of Resource Guarding

## How Should Dog Owners React?

Guarding their food, toys, beds, and even their people from other animals or humans is normal behavior for dogs. They assume that an approaching person or animal intends to take away a high-value item. Although most adults know not to bother dogs when they are eating or try to take toys away, when children are involved, resource guarding can get out of hand.

Their reactions can range from relatively harmless behavior such as running away with an item or growling, to aggressive behavior such as biting, lunging or chasing others away. Other body language to look for is lifting the lips, showing teeth, stiffening of the body or a hard stare. Children are more likely to be bitten because they don't recognize the warning signs.

Punishing, yelling at or other attempts to "dominate" dogs that are guarding resources rarely works and is an unwise course of action. This can worsen the problem, hurt your relationship with your pup, and result in someone being injured. Instead, experts use desensitization and counterconditioning to change how a dog perceives the situation. It involves slowly training them that someone else approaching the space or item is not a threat.

Be sure to let us know if this behavior is new, since sudden aggression can stem from a medical condition. If you think your dog may bite you, don't attempt to resolve a resource guarding issue without help. We will be happy to refer you to a specialist who can help.



We provide expert care  
for extra-special pets.



Countryside  
Animal Hospital

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Tempe, AZ 85284

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today to make your appointment!

## Make Checkups a Spring Thing!



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