



## Animal Welfare Concerns for Disabled Animals

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### Abstract

Disabled animals require special care and protection to cope up with their day to day activities. The disabilities arise due to congenital, hereditary, accidental, illnesses and due to ageing process. Such animals are facing challenges like ill treatment by other animals and the people. There are several welfare measures adopted by different agencies for the disabled animals. In this article we are trying to describe about them in a brief way.

**Keywords:** Animal, Disabled, Care, Challenges, Rehabilitation, Welfare

### Introduction

The term “welfare” describes the physical and psychological condition of an individual as shaped by its interaction with the environment. Animals have a variety of needs that arise from the essential body and behavioural systems required to support life and normal functioning. A need is a condition of deficiency in an animal that can be addressed by supplying a necessary resource or by responding to an appropriate environmental or physiological stimulus (Broom, 1991). Disability refers to a range of physical, sensory, or cognitive differences that can significantly affect one or more major life functions in animals, either temporarily or permanently. It results from the interaction between an individual’s health status and external factors, which together reflect the conditions in which the individual lives. Consideration of animals with disabilities is important for developing our perspective on

disabilities. Misjudgments about disabled animals may result in their harm or death (Whitley *et al.*, 2025). Disabilities in pets are physical or health problems that affect their daily life. Pet animals like dogs, cats, and other animals can be born with these conditions or develop them later stage in life (Petplace.com, 2025).

### Challenges faced by Disabled animals

Young animals may be born with congenital defects that cause issues such as deafness, blindness, heart problems, hydrocephalus, spina bifida, cerebellar hypoplasia, limb deformities, or conditions affecting their muscles, bones, and nerves. Some disabilities may develop later in life due to factors such as accidents, inherited conditions, illnesses, or the natural aging process (The disabled pets’ project, 2025). Pets can lose their hearing as they grow older, and some, particularly pure white dogs, are born deaf



(Doherty, 2020). It is important to note that pets with limited or no senses may face greater risks in their surroundings, such as traffic or dangerous objects. Some pets may also have “hidden” disabilities that are not immediately visible. How a pet loses or has reduced use of a sense affects its ability to adapt. Pets may also have less visible but important conditions, such as epilepsy, diabetes, or arthritis. They can have paralysis, limited movement from spinal cord injury, or missing or deformed limbs.

Stray disabled animals are particularly at risk of hunger, mistreatment by people, and harsh weather conditions. On farms, animals may suffer injuries during handling, infections, or nutritional deficiencies, and their needs are sometimes overlooked due to limited awareness or resources. Around the world, many disabled animals live in zoos and aquariums, where these institutions face challenges in sharing their stories with the public in ways that educate while addressing concerns about the animals’ welfare (Whitley *et al.*, 2025).

While physical disabilities in animals are easily recognized, society often opts to remove or euthanize animals with disabilities. Limited understanding of animal behavior means that mental or cognitive disabilities are not always acknowledged. Scholars argue that disabled animals are sometimes seen as inspirational, tragic, or only suitable for euthanasia (Taylor, 2017). Their value is often judged based on what they can offer humans. If an animal provides no apparent benefit then they are considered it as unnecessary and euthanized.

### **Steps to improve lives of disabled animal**

With the high level of care provided to pets today, they often live longer lives. The following steps are taken to ensure the welfare and improvement of disabled animals:

**1. Pets with conditions affecting their muscles, bones, or nerves, or those injured by accidents, born with abnormalities, or affected by aging, may require support in the form of:**

- a) Mobility aids: Such as special harnesses, slings, ramps, non-slip socks, carts, and wheelchairs.
- b) Help with daily activities: Including assistance with eating, drinking, urination, and defecation.
- c) Additional care: Like massage, stretching, physiotherapy, medication, chiropractic treatments, and nutritional supplements (Petplace.com, 2025).

### **2. Sensory conditions, such as congenital defects, diseases, or other health issues, may need special care:**

- a) Communication: Deaf animals respond well to hand signals, while blind animals rely on sound.
- b) Supervision and safety: They need closer monitoring in risky areas, should be kept on a leash, and may benefit from aids like halo collars.
- c) Home adjustments: Modifying the home by fencing off stairs or removing sharp furniture can help keep disabled pets safe, comfortable, and reduce accidents related to sensory impairments.

### **3. Pets with other disabilities:**

- a. Epilepsy: Maintain a controlled living environment and ensure the owner knows how to respond during a seizure.
- b. Diabetes: Provide a special diet, regularly monitor blood sugar levels, and train the owner to recognize related problems and manage medication.
- c. Cognitive decline: Provide dietary supplements and mentally stimulating activities.

### **4. Adopting any animal is a rewarding experience, especially when it comes to shelter pets with special needs. To support them, it is important to adapt:**

- a. Home modifications: Make changes to help pet feel comfortable and meet their needs.
- b. Ramps: Useful for pets with limited mobility, such as those with missing

- limbs, arthritis, or blindness, to move easily between levels.
- c. Fencing off dangerous areas: Protect pets that cannot recognize hazards, such as steep drops, deep water, sharp furniture edges, or fireplaces.
- d. Creating suitable spaces: Arrange furniture and spaces for wheelchairs, and provide safe, calm, and easily accessible areas for pet.

### 5. Grooming and Hygiene

Pets with mobility issues may not be able to groom themselves properly, so regular care is important to prevent infections and keep them comfortable:

- a. Keep fur, especially around the rear and genital areas, clean to avoid urine burns or matting.
- b. Bathe the pet when necessary, using mild, hypoallergenic shampoos.
- c. Trim nails regularly to prevent discomfort or injury.
- d. Use pet-safe wipes for quick clean-ups between baths.
- e. For incontinent pets, washable diapers or belly bands can help keep them and home clean.
- f. Regular grooming provides bonding time and monitoring pet's skin and overall health.

### 6. Veterinary Treatment and Rehabilitation

Many disabled pets require regular veterinary care to manage discomfort, prevent complications, and maintain a good quality of life. Important aspects include:

- a. Routine veterinarian visits to monitor the disability and detect any related problems.
- b. Pain management through medications or treatments such as acupuncture or laser therapy.
- c. Physical therapy and hydrotherapy to maintain muscle strength, improve circulation, and support mobility.
- d. Bladder training for paralyzed pets to prevent infections.

- e. Working with veterinarian to develop a care plan to pet's specific health needs (Petindiaonline.com, 2025).

### 7. Devices and Walking Aids

Disabled pets often need mobility aids to help them move independently and improve their quality of life. Common aids include:

- a. Pet wheelchairs or carts: Support paralyzed or partially paralyzed pets, allowing them to move using their front limbs.
- b. Leg braces or splints: Provide support for weak or injured limbs.
- c. Harnesses and slings: Help pets with balance problems walk or go upstairs.
- d. Protective shoes: Protect sensitive or numb paws from harsh surfaces or weather.

### 8. Diet and Weight Management in Disabled Pets

Maintaining a healthy weight is important for disabled pets, as excess weight can put extra strain on their joints and worsen mobility issues. Key tips include:

- a. Provide a balanced, high-quality diet suitable for pet's age and health needs.
- b. Consider supplements like glucosamine, chondroitin, and omega-3 fatty acids to support joint health.
- c. Control portion sizes to avoid overfeeding, and monitor pet's weight regularly.
- d. Ensure fresh, clean water is always available.
- e. Some organizations, such as PetIndiaOnline.com, offer vet-recommended special diets and supplements designed for disabled pets.

### 9. Helping Disabled Pets

We can support disabled dogs, cats, and other pets in several ways:

- a. Donate: Shelters often welcome items such as old clothes, toys, blankets,

towels, pet food, medicines, and care products.

- b. Fundraise: Help cover costs for medication, equipment, supplies, and food.
- c. Raise awareness: Share information with friends, family, and colleagues to reduce stigma around disabled pets.
- d. Volunteer: Ask the local shelter provider if they can help care for animals temporarily.
- e. Foster: Provide a temporary home for a disabled pet until they are adopted.

#### 10. Building a Support Network

Caring for a disabled pet can sometimes be challenging, so having a support network is important for guidance and emotional support:

- a. Join online communities or forums focused on special needs pets.
- b. Connect with local veterinarians and pet rehabilitation centers.
- c. Reach out to rescue groups or organizations experienced with disabled pets for advice and resources.
- d. Remember, there are many other caregivers who are willing to offer help and support.

#### 11. Informal Learning Environments: Zoos and Aquariums

- a) Zoos, aquariums, and similar organizations play an important role in supporting animals with disabilities.
- b) They help ensure that disabled animals are valued and not underestimated (Guenther, 2023).
- c) Online platforms can also be effectively used to raise awareness and promote the well-being of animals with disabilities.

#### Conclusion

Animal welfare should also focus on the needs of animals with disabilities, as physical, sensory, cognitive, or hidden problems do not reduce an animal's value or its right to live a good life. With proper medical treatment, simple changes in their environment, supportive devices, good nutrition, and caring human

support, disabled animals can adjust well and live comfortable and healthy lives. Reducing negative attitudes, spreading awareness, and building strong support systems through families, communities, shelters, veterinary services, and places like zoos and aquariums are important to protect these animals. A caring and inclusive welfare approach improves the lives of disabled animals and helps society better understand disability in all living beings.

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