



Living With Low Vision:

What you should know



National Eye Institute



National Eye Health
Education Program
NEHEP

*A program of the National
Institutes of Health*

Living With Low Vision:

What you should know



Presenter Instructions:

- Introduce yourself to the group.
- Tell your audience how long the presentation will last.
- Engage the audience by asking them to introduce themselves and to name one thing they would like to learn from this presentation.



Talking Points:

- The purpose of this presentation is to provide information about low vision, what can be done about it, and where to get more information.
- After attending this presentation, you will be able to do the following:
 - Identify signs that may signal vision loss.
 - Define low vision and vision rehabilitation.
 - Outline what you can do if you have low vision.
 - List questions that are good to ask an eye care professional and/or specialist in low vision.




Is Vision Loss Part of Getting Older?

- Vision can change as we age.
- Vision loss and blindness are not a normal part of aging.




Talking Point:

- Many changes to vision are normal and common as you age. But losing vision or going blind is not a normal part of aging.



What Vision Changes Are Normal?

- Focusing on objects up close is harder to do.
- Noticing declining sensitivity.
- Needing more light to see well.
- Needing more time to adjust to changing levels of light.




Talking Points:

- As we get older, our eyes and vision change. Some of these normal changes include:
 - Losing the ability to focus, which makes it harder to perform tasks such as reading, writing, playing cards, and working on the computer.
 - Noticing declining contrast and color sensitivity, making it harder to distinguish colors such as blue and black or distinguish where an object ends and its background begins.
 - Needing more light to see well and more time to adjust to changing levels of light. For example, going from a room that is dark to one that is brightly lit.
- These changes usually don't lead to low vision.



Presenter Instruction:

- Ask the audience if anyone can define low vision before you go to the next slide.




What Is Low Vision?

- Vision that is not corrected by eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery.
- Low vision may make everyday tasks difficult to do.




Talking Points:

- Low vision is a visual impairment that is not corrected by standard eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery. Low vision may interfere with the ability to perform everyday activities.
- People with low vision may find everyday tasks difficult to do. This may include:
 - Reading the newspaper, mail, or bills.
 - Shopping, including seeing prices or reading labels on food.
 - Watching TV.
 - Writing.
 - Driving or getting around their neighborhood.




What Causes Low Vision?

- Sometimes vision loss occurs because of eye injuries or birth defects.
- Most people develop low vision because of the following:
 - Age-related macular degeneration
 - Cataract
 - Diabetic eye disease
 - Glaucoma



Talking Points:

- Some people develop low vision after eye injuries or from birth defects.
- Most people develop low vision because of the following eye diseases:
 - Age-related macular degeneration or AMD [Pronunciation: MACK-you-luhr Dee-jen-er-RAY-shun]
 - Cataract [Pronunciation: KAT-uh-rakt]
 - Diabetic eye disease
 - Glaucoma [Pronunciation: Glaw-KO-muh]
- If these diseases and conditions are diagnosed early, treatment can sometimes prevent or delay vision loss.
- Irreversible vision loss is most common in people over age 65.
- Although vision that's lost usually cannot be restored, many people can use vision rehabilitation and adaptive devices to make the most of their remaining vision.




Signs of Low Vision

- Even with your regular glasses or contact lenses, you have difficulty with the following:
 - Recognizing familiar faces.
 - Reading.
 - Cooking.
 - Picking out and matching the color of your clothes.
 - Reading street signs.




Talking Point:

- There are many signs that can signal vision loss. For example, even when wearing your regular glasses or contact lenses, you may have difficulty with some of the following:
 - Recognizing familiar faces.
 - Doing things that require you to see well up close, such as reading, cooking, sewing, or fixing things around the house.
 - Picking out and matching the color of your clothes.
 - Reading street signs, bus signs, or the names of stores.




How Do You Know When To Get an Eye Exam?

- When you experience vision changes.
- Make it part of your routine health care:
 - People aged 50 or older should have a comprehensive dilated eye exam.




Talking Points:

- If you experience any vision changes, you should see your eye care professional as soon as possible. A change in vision could be an early warning sign of eye disease.
- Early detection, timely treatment, and appropriate follow-up may prevent vision loss or blindness.
- Regular comprehensive dilated eye exams should be part of your routine health care. If you are age 50 or older, you should see your eye care professional for a comprehensive dilated eye exam, even if you aren't having any eye problems.
- Your eye care professional can tell the difference between normal changes in the aging eye and those caused by eye diseases.
- If you have an eye disease, talk with your eye care professional about how often you will need to have your eyes examined.




How Do You Know if You Have Low Vision?

- Only an eye care professional can tell if you have low vision.




Talking Points:

- Only an eye care professional can tell if you have low vision.
- An eye care professional is an *ophthalmologist* (oph-thal-MOL-o-gist) or *optometrist* (op-TOM-e-trist).
- *Optional Information: The following information may be useful if participants ask about the difference between an ophthalmologist and optometrist.*
 - *An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who specializes in eye health and eye care. Ophthalmologists are specially trained to provide the full spectrum of eye care, from prescribing glasses and contact lenses to performing complex and delicate eye surgery.*
 - *An optometrist is the primary healthcare professional for the eye. Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases, injuries, and disorders of the visual system, the eye, and associated structures. They also identify related systemic conditions affecting the eye.*
- Your eye care professional may refer you to a specialist in low vision for a low vision assessment.



What Is a Low Vision Assessment?


- A low vision assessment determines the extent of vision loss and potential for vision rehabilitation.




Talking Points:

- A low vision assessment determines the extent of vision loss and potential for vision rehabilitation.
- An assessment by a specialist in low vision is an important first step to choosing rehabilitation services that can help you adapt to vision loss and maintain your normal activities.

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- The specialist in low vision will assess the following:
 - Your general health and eye health history.
 - Functions of daily living related to your vision.
 - Your visual acuity and other eye functions.



Talking Points:

- The specialist in low vision will assess the following:
 - Your general health and eye health history.
 - Daily living activities related to your vision.
 - Your visual acuity and other eye functions.
- Results of the assessment will be used to:
 - Prescribe treatment options, including low vision devices.
 - Help you identify other resources for rehabilitation.
- Vision rehabilitation can be more effective if it is started as soon as low vision problems are identified.



What Can You Do if You Have Low Vision?

- Take charge.
- Visit your eye care professional or a specialist in low vision.
- Ask about vision rehabilitation.
- Learn about low vision devices and services.



Talking Points:

- Take charge. Learn about devices and services that can help you keep your independence.
- Talk with your eye care professional about your vision problems.
- Ask your eye care professional for a referral to a specialist in low vision who is an ophthalmologist or optometrist trained to evaluate and treat low vision.
- Find out where you can get more information about services and devices that can help you to maintain your independence.
 - Different types of vision loss require different types of visual devices and training in how to use them.
- Ask about vision rehabilitation. Look for programs that offer the following:
 - A wide range of services, such as low vision evaluations and special training to use visual and adaptive devices.
 - Guidance for modifying your home.
 - Group support from others with low vision.



Presenter Instruction:

- Ask the audience if anyone currently uses any low vision devices or services.




Vision Rehabilitation

- Offers information about devices and services.
- Helps people adapt to vision loss and maintain their independence.




Talking Point:

- Vision rehabilitation offers information about devices and services to help people adapt to vision loss and maintain their independence.



Low Vision Devices

- Many people require more than one visual device. Some examples of devices are listed below:
 - Glasses
 - Telescopic lenses
 - Special software for computers
 - Other devices



Talking Points:

- There are a variety of devices that people with low vision can use.
- Many people require more than one visual device. The following are some examples of devices:
 - Glasses with high-powered lenses
 - Telescopic lenses for distance viewing
 - Special software to work effectively on computers
 - Other devices that can help you with daily activities
- Talk with your specialist in low vision about the best devices for you.






Presenter Instruction:

- Ask participants to identify some low vision devices.

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■ Glasses with high-powered lenses



Talking Point:

- At home, people need devices that can help them read, write, and manage the tasks of daily living. These adaptive devices include prescription reading glasses with high-powered lenses and reading prisms.

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■ Telescopic lenses



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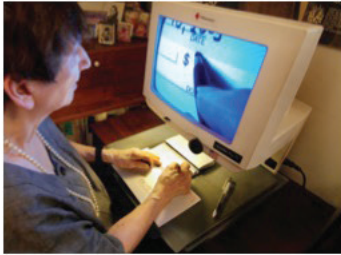


Talking Point:


- Visual devices, such as telescopic spectacles and reversed telescopes for visual field defects, can help people with low vision. These devices must be prescribed by eye care professionals, and patients must be trained to use them.

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■ Special software for computers



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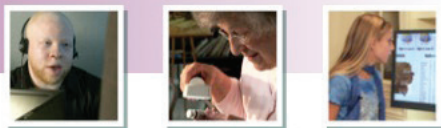




Talking Point:

- Computers can help people who have low vision with reading and writing. New technology can increase text size on computer screens and allow computers to read what appears on the screen.

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■ Other devices



Talking Point:

- Other devices that can be helpful for daily activities include guides to help you write letters or checks and magnifying glasses to help you read.



Presenter Instructions:

- Show the video *Living With Low Vision: Stories of Hope and Independence*, which can be found at www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision/content/profiles/hope_independence.asp.
- Ask participants to identify where they would go to receive low vision services.



Where Can You Go for Services?

- Ophthalmology or optometry offices that specialize in low vision.
- Hospital clinics.
- State, nonprofit, or for-profit vision rehabilitation organizations.
- Independent-living centers.



Talking Point:

- Vision rehabilitation services can take place in different locations. Some of these places are:
 - Ophthalmology or optometry offices that specialize in low vision.
 - Hospital clinics.
 - State, nonprofit, or for-profit vision rehabilitation organizations.
 - Independent-living centers.



How Can You Find a Specialist?

- Talk with your eye care professional about local resources.
- Visit www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision



Talking Points:

- To find a specialist in low vision, talk with your eye care professional. He or she may be able to refer you to a variety of local resources to assist you.
- You can also visit this website for additional resources: www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision



Be Your Best Health Advocate


- Investigate and learn as much as you can.
- Ask questions about vision rehabilitation, and ask for a referral for care or a resource for more information.




Talking Points:

- Investigate and learn as much as you can, especially if you have been told that you may lose more vision. Be persistent about getting information.
- Ask questions about vision rehabilitation and ask for a referral for care or a resource for more information. Many resources are available to help you.

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- Learn about low vision programs, devices, and technology.
- Get support from family and friends.
- Establish a good relationship with your eye care professional and specialist in low vision.



Talking Point:

- Remember the following:
 - Rehabilitation programs, devices, and technology can help you adapt to vision loss. They may help you keep doing many of the things you did before.
 - Your family and friends can provide support. Don't be afraid to ask them for help.
 - You and your eye care professional and specialist in low vision need to work in partnership to achieve what is best for you. An important part of this relationship is good communication.



Questions To Ask Your Eye Care Professional


- What changes can I expect in my vision?
- Will my vision loss get worse?
- How much of my vision will I lose?
- Will regular eyeglasses improve my vision?
- What can I do to protect my vision?




Talking Point:

- To help you talk with your eye care professional and gain a better understanding of low vision, you can:
 - Ask questions and get the information you need to take care of you and your family. If you don't understand your eye care professional's responses, ask questions until you do—or ask where you can go for more information.
 - Take notes or get a friend or family member to take notes for you.
 - Take a tape recorder with you to record answers.
 - These are some questions you can ask your eye care professional.

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- Will diet, exercise, or lifestyle changes help?
- If my vision can't be corrected, can you refer me to a specialist in low vision?
- Where can I get a low vision assessment?
- Where can I get vision rehabilitation?



Talking Point:

- Here are more suggestions to help you talk with your eye care professional and gain a better understanding of low vision:
 - Ask your eye care professional to write down his or her instructions for you.
 - Ask your eye care professional for printed material about your condition.
 - Talk to other members of your healthcare team, such as nurses and pharmacists. They can be good sources of information too.



Questions To Ask Your Specialist in Low Vision

- How can I continue my daily activities?
- Are there resources to help me in my job?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities around the house?




Talking Points:

- Special devices can help you with daily activities, such as reading, sewing, cooking, or fixing things around the house.
- Today, people take an active role in their health care. Be an active participant in your eye care.
- These are some questions you can ask your specialist in low vision.

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- What training and services are available to help me live better and more safely?
- Where can I find support to cope with my vision loss?




Talking Points:

- Here are additional questions you can ask your specialist in low vision.
- You can find these questions in the *Living With Low Vision* booklet.




Presenter Instruction:

- Hand out the *Living With Low Vision* booklet to participants.



Review

- Low vision is vision that cannot be corrected.
- People with low vision can make the most of the vision they have.
- It pays to be proactive. Learn about vision rehabilitation services.
- Questions?




Talking Points:

- Let's recap some of the key points about low vision that have been presented today:
 - Some changes are normal as you age. However, you may be at increased risk for eye diseases that can cause low vision.
 - Losing vision is not a normal part of aging. Your eye care professional can tell the difference between normal changes in the aging eye and those caused by eye diseases.
 - Low vision is a visual impairment that is not corrected by standard eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery. Low vision may interfere with the ability to perform everyday activities.
 - Usually, the earlier your problem is diagnosed, the better the chance of keeping your remaining vision.
 - While vision that's lost usually cannot be restored, many people can make the most of their remaining vision with the assistance of vision rehabilitation.
 - If you have low vision, take charge. Learn about devices and services that can help you keep your independence.



Presenter Instruction:

- Ask if anyone has questions.



Where To Get More Information

National Eye Institute (NEI)

For more information, visit
www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision

Or call NEI at 301-496-5248



Talking Points:

- On behalf of the National Eye Institute (NEI) and (name of your organization), thank you for attending this workshop. Please be sure to visit NEI's website or call NEI for more information. You can also contact me or visit our website at _____ for more information.
- To get more information, please visit NEI's Low Vision website:
www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision
- You can also contact your state or local rehabilitation agency for the blind and visually impaired.

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