

Eye on Health

Help For Americans With Vision Loss

(NAPSA)—Here's eye-opening news: With a little help, the 2.9 million Americans living with low vision—and the millions more who may have to some day—can maximize their remaining eyesight and safely enjoy a productive and rewarding life.

What It Is

Low vision means that even with regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine or surgery, people find everyday tasks difficult to do. Reading the mail, shopping, cooking and writing can seem challenging. Most people with low vision are 65 years old or older. The chief causes of vision loss in older people are age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cataract and glaucoma. Among younger Americans, low vision is most often caused by inherited eye conditions, infectious and autoimmune eye disease, or trauma.

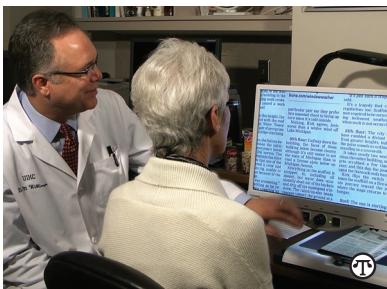
Getting Help

"I encourage anyone with low vision to seek guidance about vision rehabilitation from a low vision specialist," advised Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D.

A low vision specialist is an ophthalmologist or optometrist working with people with low vision. He or she can develop a rehabilitation plan that identifies strategies and assistive devices appropriate for the person's particular needs.

Vision rehabilitation can include:

- training to use magnifying and adaptive devices
- learning new daily living skills to remain safe and live independently
- developing strategies to navigate inside and outside the home
- providing resources and support.



Vision rehabilitation can make a world of difference to a person adjusting to vision loss and should be considered part of the continuum of care.

"A vision rehabilitation plan helps people reach their true visual potential when nothing more can be done from a medical or surgical standpoint," said Mark Wilkinson, O.D., a low vision specialist at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics.

More Help

Help can also come from the National Eye Institute (NEI), a part of NIH. It offers a 20-page large-print booklet, "What You Should Know About Low Vision," a series of videos featuring patient stories about living with low vision.

The NEI, committed to finding new ways to improve the lives of people living with visual impairment, dedicates more than \$24 million to research projects aimed at low vision. Projects include learning how the brain adapts to vision loss, strategies to improve vision rehabilitation, and the development of new technologies to help people with low vision read, shop, and find their way in unfamiliar places.

Free Resources

The booklet, videos and other resources are at www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision.