

What You Should Know about Low Vision

What is low vision?

Low vision means that even with regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, people find everyday tasks difficult to do. Millions of Americans lose some of their vision every year. Irreversible vision loss is most common among people over age 65.

Is losing vision just part of getting older?

No. Some normal changes in our eyes and vision occur as we get older. However, these changes usually don't lead to low vision.

Most people develop low vision because of eye diseases and health conditions like macular degeneration, cataract, glaucoma, and diabetes. While vision that's lost usually cannot be restored, many people can make the most of the vision they have.

Your eye care professional can tell the difference between normal changes in the aging eye and those caused by eye diseases.

How do I know if I have low vision?

You should have regular dilated eye exams to determine your eye health, but there are many signs that can signal vision loss. For example, even with your regular glasses, do you have difficulty:

- Recognizing faces of friends and relatives?
- Doing things that require you to see well up close, like reading, cooking, sewing, or fixing things around the house?
- Picking out and matching the color of your clothes?
- Doing things at work or home because lights seem dimmer than they used to?
- Reading street and bus signs or the names of stores?

Vision changes like these could be early warning signs of eye disease. If you believe your vision has recently changed, you should see your eye care professional as soon as possible

What Can I Do If I Have Low Vision?

Talk with your eye care professional

Many people with low vision are taking charge. They want more information about devices and services that can help them keep their independence.

There are different specific visual devices, such as magnifying lenses for close-up viewing, and telescopic lenses for seeing in the distance, and can be given to individual patient based on their disease and visual need. The eye care professional will train you on how to use them.

If your eye care professional says, "Nothing more can be done for your vision," ask about vision rehabilitation. These programs offer a wide range of services, such as low vision evaluations and special training to use visual and adaptive devices. They also offer guidance for modifying your home as well as group support from others with low vision.

Investigate and learn

Remember that you are your best health advocate. Investigate and learn as much as you can, especially if you have been told that you may lose more vision. It is important that you ask questions about vision rehabilitation and get answers. Many resources are available to help you.

Write down questions to ask your doctor, or take a tape recorder with you.

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.

What Can I Do If I Have Low Vision?

You and your eye care professional or 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.

Here are some questions to ask your eye care professional or specialist in low vision to get the discussion started:

Questions to ask your eye care professional

- What can I do about my low vision?
- 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 medical/surgical treatments are available for my condition?
- What can I do to protect or prolong my vision?
- Will diet, exercise, or other 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 examination and evaluation? Where can I get vision rehabilitation?

Questions to ask your specialist in low vision

- How can I continue my normal, routine activities?
- Are there resources to help me in my job?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities like reading, sewing, cooking, or fixing things around the house?
- What training and services are available to help me live better and more safely with low vision?
- Where can I find individual or group support to cope with my vision loss?