



Patient Information Guide to Low Vision

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WELCOME

If you have received a copy of this guide, chances are you or someone you know has low vision. Low vision means you have trouble seeing and your eyesight cannot be corrected with regular glasses, contact lenses, surgery, or medication.

Sometimes, people who have low vision can feel as if they are alone, but nothing could be further from the truth. One in every twenty Americans has low vision, and there is a vast array of resources, strategies, and products available to help people with low vision live active, full, and independent lives.

This guide is designed to answer some of your most immediate questions and point you toward resources and approaches that we hope will expand your horizons.



Table of Contents

Frequently Asked Questions.....	1
Low Vision Conditions.....	2
Recognizing and Living with Low Vision.....	5
Vision Rehabilitation is the Key.....	6
Vision Enhancement Products.....	8
Support Resources.....	11

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. I have low vision. Does this mean I will go blind?

A. While some eye diseases can cause total loss of sight, most generally do not. Some individuals may be considered legally blind, meaning they have less than 20/200 vision, or their field of vision is restricted to a 20-degree diameter, but even then, they often have a lot of available vision that can be used with proper management and vision enhancement.

Q. Will I be totally dependent on others?

A. Not at all. With the help of vision rehabilitation, you can learn to adapt to the changes in your vision and continue to live a very full, active, and independent life.

Q. Will I always have low vision?

A. Some causes of low vision, such as cataracts, are very treatable and good vision can be restored. When caught early, other conditions like wet macular degeneration and glaucoma can be stopped or slowed, although these conditions are not reversible.

Q. Will treatment for my low vision be covered by insurance?

A. Fortunately, many aspects of vision rehabilitation are now covered by Medicare as well as some private insurance companies. However, many of the adaptive devices you might need are not covered by most insurers, but some may be available at little or no cost through vision support organizations listed in this guide.



LOW VISION CONDITIONS

Low vision may be caused by a wide range of eye disorders and conditions. Some of these include:

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD):

AMD is a degenerative disease of the retina that causes progressive loss of vision in the center of the eye. It is described as having a spot or blurry space in the middle of your vision that interferes with daily tasks like reading and driving. While it significantly reduces vision, AMD does not cause total blindness. If it's caught early, laser surgery may be able to prevent extensive vision loss. The risk of developing macular degeneration increases with age and is the most common cause of vision loss in people over the age of 55, particularly women.

There are two types of macular degeneration: dry and wet.

Dry AMD occurs when yellow-white deposits called drusen accumulate under the macula, which is the central portion of the retina. In wet AMD, abnormal blood vessel growth forms under the macula and leaks fluid, which damages photoreceptor cells. Wet AMD can progress rapidly and cause serious damage.

This Is What It Can Mean To
Have Low Vision or Blindness

Macular
Degeneration



Diabetic
Retinopathy



Glaucoma



Cataract



Blindness



Glaucoma:

Glaucoma is a serious eye disease caused by a build-up of pressure in the eye that damages the optic nerve. It affects peripheral vision, causing the edges of the visual field to fade, although it may also cause blank areas at the center of the eye.

Symptoms of glaucoma include blurred vision, seeing colored rings around lights, loss of peripheral vision, and pain and redness in the eye. Often, the disease may happen slowly with no symptoms until damage is done. Once damage occurs, it cannot be reversed, but prompt treatment with eye drops and/or laser surgery can prevent the disease from progressing. Lifelong management of the disease is required to prevent eye damage.



Diabetic Retinopathy:

Although diabetes does not necessarily lead to sight loss, people with the disease may experience a condition in which their diabetes causes blood vessels that feed the retina of the eye to break. The resulting damage may appear as spots or blanks in the field of vision. This condition is called Diabetic Retinopathy. In more severe cases, blood clots and scar tissue can develop on the retina, which can lead to complete vision loss.

All people with diabetes should have regular eye exams and maintain good diabetic management. If the disease is detected, leaking vessels may sometimes be closed using a laser.

Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP):

Retinitis Pigmentosa is a group of inherited diseases that affect the retina of the eye, causing degeneration of photoreceptor cells. These cells are what capture light, enabling us to see. When these cells degenerate, patients experience loss of night vision, color vision, and peripheral vision. Eventually, tunnel vision may occur.

While inherited, Retinitis Pigmentosa may skip generations, and therefore is difficult to track. Any person who has a family member with a retinal disease should consider being seen by an eye care professional.

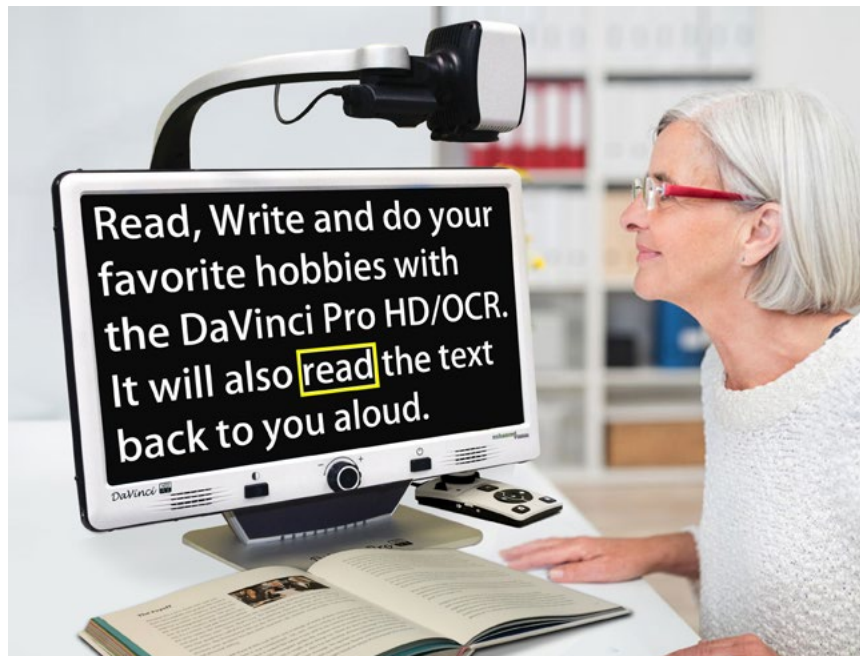
Cataracts:

Cataracts are a clouding of the eye's lens that causes blurriness and loss of vision. The word cataract literally means waterfall, and when a cataract is severe, it's like trying to see through a waterfall.

Cataracts occur when the protein that makes up the eye's lens becomes clumped. Scientists

believe that cataracts may be brought on by smoking and diabetes, as well as the impact of ultraviolet light and general wear and tear on the protein of the lens over the years. Fortunately, cataracts are highly treatable.

Cataract surgery involves removing and replacing the clouded lens with a clear plastic one. It is a relatively simple procedure and very successful in restoring sight.



RECOGNIZING AND LIVING WITH LOW VISION

First of all, realize that you are not alone.

Millions of Americans experience low vision and there are many organizations, professionals, and resources (some listed in this guide) available to you.

If you are experiencing changes in your vision, it's important to visit an eye care professional immediately. Notice if you're having trouble performing tasks that require you to see up close, or are having difficulty picking out colors, seeing signs, or doing work in light that used to be sufficient. These may be early signs of eye disease. Many eye conditions, if caught early, can be controlled and damage limited.

If you are experiencing vision loss due to eye disease, your doctor will likely refer you to a low vision specialist. This dedicated eye care professional will be able to evaluate your available vision and refer you to other specialists who can assist with rehabilitation and resources.

You will also find many ways to make daily life easier to navigate. You'll find that your state has at least one library offering audio books and large-print publications. Many services, like banks, offer large-print checks and services, like the utility company, may offer large-type billing.

There are also many discounts and exemptions offered for people who are legally blind, such as those from the IRS, the Post Office, and many public transit systems.



VISION REHABILITATION IS THE KEY

At the very center of an active and independent life with low vision is vision rehabilitation. Fortunately, the U.S. government has recognized the importance of such rehabilitation to a growing percentage of the population and Medicare now covers many aspects of vision rehabilitation. Vision rehabilitation is usually provided by a Vision Rehabilitation Specialist in conjunction with your low vision eye care specialist.



The Main Steps of Vision Rehabilitation:

- Identification of the low vision condition and underlying disorder.
- An analysis of your current refraction, meaning what strength glasses you require and which, if any, special filters or other additions that need to be used with your glasses.
- Analysis and tracking of the exact position of your scotoma (the areas of vision that are blurred or missing). This analysis will help determine your Preferred Retina Location, which is the area of vision from which you see best.
- Training in eccentric viewing teaches you to see “around” the areas of vision that are damaged. This will involve a series of sessions with your Vision Rehabilitation Specialist using special teaching tools.

Daily Living Training:

Daily living training provides new and better ways to do the activities you value most; this includes identification of needed vision-enhancing devices and learning how to use them. It may involve everything from selecting appropriate lighting made for low vision, using a simple magnifying glass, or learning to use an electronic magnifier that enhances vision close-up, midrange, and at a distance.

You'll also find there are a wide array of adaptive devices such as large-print phone keypads, talking clocks, magnifying mirrors, household and kitchen tools, etc.

Learning to live with changes in your vision isn't something you have to do alone. Support groups and even counseling are available to help you learn to live the most active and independent life with low vision.

Remarkably, a huge change in a person's ability to see with low vision can be made in just a few Vision Rehabilitation sessions.



VISION ENHANCEMENT PRODUCTS TO FIT YOUR NEEDS

There is a large selection of devices to help people with low vision. Some are optical, meaning that they are glass lenses, such as magnifying glasses and telescopes. Others are electronic, meaning they use video and projection to expand and clarify vision. Some devices are portable, while others sit on a desk or table.

There are three types of magnification devices: near, intermediate, and distance. Sometimes, one device can provide all three. Your selection will be based on your needs and goals.

Optical devices have limited magnification, are sensitive to lighting conditions, and have a small field of view, making them more suitable for lower levels of vision loss.

Electronic devices have integrated lighting, greater magnification, a larger field of view, and are capable of greater contrast, making them suitable for both lesser to more significant levels of impairment.

All of these types of devices are not usually covered by insurance, but some of the simple ones may be available at little or no cost through public and private support institutions.



Near Vision Aids:

- Hand-held optical magnifiers for reading are available both illuminated and non-illuminated. They generally provide a lower magnification range of 2x to 10x with a smaller field of view and are portable and compact, easily fitting in a pocket or purse.
- Stand optical magnifiers, both illuminated and non-illuminated, can be used for both reading and writing. They provide a lower magnification range of 2x to 10x with a smaller field of view. They are portable and can be carried from place to place, but are not pocket-size.
- Electronic hand-held systems for reading and writing provide magnification up to 25x with a wide field of view and high contrast viewing modes. These battery-operated systems are portable and can be carried from place to place in a purse or backpack.
- Electronic Desktop HD magnifiers with Text-to-Speech (OCR) capabilities typically sit on a desk or table and can be used for reading, writing, personal grooming, and hobbies. They provide magnification up to 70x with a wide field of view, high-contrast viewing modes, and can read any printed text aloud with the push of a button. A high-resolution HD LCD monitor provides crystal clear images and vibrant colors.



Intermediate and Distance Vision Aids:

- Optical telemicroscopes (prescription and non-prescription) attach to your glasses in order to improve the viewing of computers and other intermediate-range objects and some objects at a distance. They provide low magnification up to 4x with a smaller field of view.
- Hand-held optical monoculars and telescopes provide magnification up to 10x with a smaller field of view.
- Flexible 3-in-1 electronic desktop HD CCTV magnifiers can offer text-to-speech, a wide field of view, and high contrast viewing modes. Give tired eyes a rest with text-to-speech and have your favorite article or book read aloud to you with the simple push of a button.

Some devices even offer a rotating camera allowing you the flexibility to see near, at a short distance, and anywhere in between. Additional features typically include adjustable brightness, multiple language recognition, computer compatibility, and the ability to save and recall documents, pictures, and even export files to your computer.



SUPPORT RESOURCES

The list of organizations and companies that concern themselves with some aspect of low vision is enormous—far greater than we have space for in this guide. Included below are a few of the principal resources that you may find useful.



Consumer Resources

- **American Foundation for the Blind**
Wide range of information, advice and resource links
Tel: 212-502-7600 // www.afb.org
- **American Macular Degeneration Foundation**
Wide range of information, advice, and resources specifically relating to macular degeneration
Toll-Free: 888-MACULAR (888-622-8527) // www.amdf.org
- **Association of Blind Citizens Assistive Technology**
If the person qualifies, the ATF will provide funds to pay for 50% of the MSRP of the adaptive device. The applicant must be legally blind and a resident of the USA
Tel: 781-961-1023 // www.blindcitizens.org
- **Audio-Reader (Radio and Audio Service for Blind and Print-Disabled Persons)**
Radio and reading service from the University of Kansas for people within their listening area
Tel: 785-864-4600 // www.reader.ku.edu

- **Enhanced Vision**

Portable and desktop electronic magnifiers

Toll-Free: 888-811-3161 // www.enhancedvision.com

- **Foundation Fighting Blindness**

Wide range of info and references on all types of retinal disorders

Toll-Free: 800-683-5555 // www.fightingblindness.org

- **Freedom Scientific**

Portable/desktop electronic magnifiers and low vision software

Toll-Free: 800-444-4443 // www.freedomscientific.com

- **The Gavin Herbert Eye Institute—Macular Degeneration Partnership**

Offering a wide range of information and resources for anyone affected by age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

Tel: 949-824-9771 // www.ucirvineamd.org

- **Lighthouse Guild**

Lighthouse International is dedicated to fighting vision loss through prevention and intervention

Toll-Free: 800-284-4422 // www.lighthouseguild.org

- **Lions Clubs**

Go to website to find phone numbers for clubs near you and to learn more about Lions Clubs Vision Programs

www.lionsclubs.org

- **National Eye Institute**

Research and current studies

Tel: 301-496-5248 // www.nei.nih.gov

- **National Federation of the Blind**

Information, advice, resources, and links

Tel: 410-659-9314 // www.nfb.org

- **Optelec**

Portable/desktop electronic magnifiers and daily living aids

Toll-Free: 800-444-4443 // www.optelec.com

- **Veterans Administration**

Visit the website for the location of your nearest VA office and information on low vision services

www.va.gov // Toll-Free: 800-827-1000

VA Health Resource Center: 877-222-8387

PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

- **American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO)**

Research, medical information, and assistance in finding a physician

Tel: 415-561-8500 // www.aao.org

- **American Academy of Optometry (AAO)**

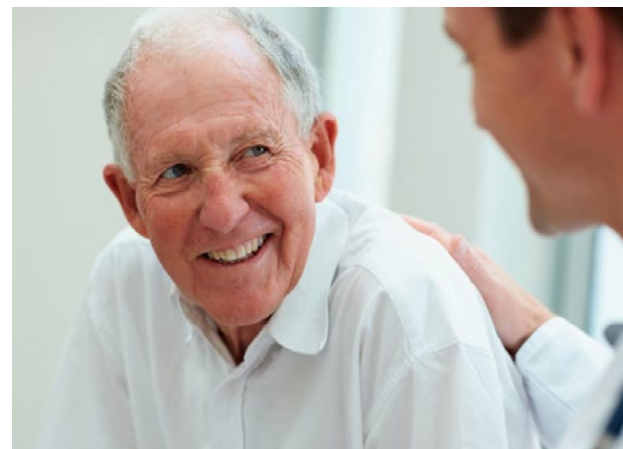
Wide range of information, advice and resource links

Tel: 321-319-4860 // www.aaopt.org

- **American Optometric Association**

Research and clinical information

Toll-Free: 800-365-2219 // www.aoa.org



Thank You

Be bold. Millions of people live full, active, independent lives with low vision, and you can be one of them. We hope this guide will help to open a new world of possibilities for you and your loved ones. Contact these websites, call the eye care professionals, ask questions—and keep asking until you get the answers you’re seeking. There are people waiting to help you. All you need to do is take the first step.

**For a FREE no-obligation demonstration
of Vispero brand products call: 800-444-4443**

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