

LOW VISION SUPPORT

What is low vision

Low vision is a term used to describe a person with a visual impairment, which cannot be rectified with surgery, glasses or contact lenses. There are many eye diseases, which can occur at birth or later in life, that cause visual loss. Some of the primary eye conditions that result in visual impairment include macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and retinitis pigmentosa.

What do individuals with low vision experience?

Individuals who experience severe vision loss, especially later in life, have great difficulty coping with this loss and often become depressed. Having low vision can decrease the quality of life for these individuals. Visual impairment makes it difficult and even impossible to maintain daily life activities. These daily activities may include driving, cooking, reading the mail, paying bills, continuing with hobbies and crafts, and reading medicine labels. They also have difficulty with face recognition.

What can I do to help?

The first thing you can do is show your loved one support. They will go through many stages trying to cope. They will go through anger, denial depression, and finally, acceptance. It is important to help them get through these stages. Sometimes pride gets the best of us, so ask them if they need help with anything, such as sorting out the mail or paying the bills.

What help is available to persons with low vision?

It is important for the person to be examined by an individual trained in low vision to rule out potential medical or surgical correction, assess their visual fields, and establish a prescription for normal and low vision glasses and optical devices.

There are various optical aids which may amplify what vision the person has left. For improving far sight, there are telescopes for face recognition and reading bus numbers and binoculars for viewing television and going to the theatre. There are many more devices available that may aid in helping with near sight such as magnifiers (with or without built in light), stand magnifiers, magnifying lamps and closed circuit television to name a few. There are other tools to help in everyday life such as talking watches, special phones, audio books, special lights, magnified games, etc. In addition, computer programs with magnified text or those that transform text to sound have become more readily available.

If low vision is very severe, there are guide dogs and canes to help with mobility.

There is plenty of low vision help available. We recommend a referral to The Low Vision Clinic (run by the Royal Society for the Blind, which was specifically set up for this purpose), for an assessment and assistance. Please ask your eye doctor to arrange this