

SMARTSIGHT™ - Patient Handout

An American Academy of Ophthalmology
Vision Rehabilitation Initiative

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MAKING THE MOST OF REMAINING VISION

Is it difficult to read newspapers and price tags, set dials or manage glare? If so, this SmartSight™ information can help with tips about the tools, techniques and resources of vision rehabilitation. Losing vision does not mean giving up your activities, but it does mean applying new ways of doing them.

Patterns of Vision and Vision Loss

Central vision is the detailed vision we use when we look directly at something. Age related macular degeneration (AMD) affects central vision. **Peripheral vision** is the less detailed vision we use to see everything to the sides. Glaucoma affects peripheral vision first. Strokes can affect one side of the peripheral vision. **Contrast sensitivity** is the ability to distinguish

between objects of similar tones such as coffee in a black cup or facial features. All eye problems can decrease contrast sensitivity.

The Experience of Vision Loss

It is always a shock to learn that your vision loss is irreversible. It is important to acknowledge the loss, anger or frustration you may feel, get help working through these feelings and apply the strategies of vision rehabilitation in order to stay active to avoid isolation and depression, which may appear as fatigue or lack of interest. If depression occurs, address it with treatment and counseling. A support group can help you recognize that your value to yourself and others does not depend on your vision. You are worth the effort to make the most of your remaining vision.

Phantom Visions: Charles Bonnet Syndrome

About 25% of people with vision loss see life-like images they know are not real. This is called Charles Bonnet Syndrome. It is not a loss of mental capacity, but just part of vision loss for some. If there are additional neurological problems, the hallucinations may be due to other diseases.

Make the Most of Remaining Vision

The following practical suggestions help many patients.

Use Your “Next-Best Spot”:

When the center of your vision is obscured by a blind spot (scotoma), you use more peripheral vision in which you may find your "next best spot" (Preferred Retinal Locus or PRL). Most patients find this automatically but often can benefit from training to use the spot more effectively.

Make Things Brighter

Improve lighting. Use a lamp directed toward your task. Carry a penlight.

Reduce glare. Indoors you can cover tables and shiny counters. Many wear yellow clip-on or fit-over glasses. Outdoors, try dark plum or amber glasses and visors.

Increase contrast. Use a black ink gel or felt pen; not a ballpoint. Draw a dark line where you need to sign. Use a white cup for coffee; for example.

Make Things Bigger

Move closer. Sit close to the TV, and at the front for performances.

Enlarge. Get large print playing cards, bingo cards, crosswords, checks, TV remotes,

calendars, keyboards and books.

Magnify. Magnifiers are available in many powers and types which are suited to different people's needs and to different tasks. There are hand-held magnifiers, stand magnifiers, video camera magnifiers, magnifiers using the cameras in cell phones and a magnifier computer mouse.

Organize

Designate spots for items in your refrigerator, and for your keys and wallet. Minimize clutter. Keep black clothes in a separate area from blue ones.

Labeling

Mark thermostats and dials with high contrast markers, label medications with markers or rubber bands or use a safety-pin in labels of similar colored clothing.

Substituting: Let's Hear it for Ears!

There are many free audio books/magazines available. Talking watches, glucometers and memo recorders can be purchased. Screen reader software speaks aloud what is on a computer monitor.

Participating

Don't isolate yourself. Keep your social group,

volunteer job, or golf game. It might require lighting, large print cards, a magnifier, a ride, or someone to help you. Ask for the help you need. There is nothing independent about staying home to avoid asking for help.

Driving

Pick your driving times, map routes carefully, and consider using a GPS or tinted lenses. Ask yourself: Do cars appear unexpectedly? Do drivers honk at you? Are you having fender-benders? If the answer is “yes,” consider an on road driving assessment, driving rehabilitation or the following transportation alternatives.

Transportation Alternatives: Be Creative!

Hire a driver, share your car, arrange for a taxi, buy gas for a friend who drives or use senior or public transit systems. Try a three-wheel bike or battery-powered scooter at a walking speed. Walk if you are able. Set the pace for your peers by using these alternatives now. The future will offer even more solutions.

For Family and Friends

Your loved one with vision loss needs to be

empowered to do as much as possible independently. Recognize the challenge of vision loss, and don't take over their tasks. Instead, help identify the adjustments they need to make to maximize their independence.

Vision Rehabilitation

A low vision evaluation and rehabilitation training can help you make the most of your vision.

Ask providers if services include:

- A low vision evaluation by an ophthalmologist or optometrist
- Advice about devices. Are some devices loaned before purchase or returnable?
- Rehabilitation training: reading, writing, shopping, cooking, lighting and glare control.
- Home assessment. Mobility training.

Information about support groups.

- Are services free, billed to Medicare or other insurances? If not, what is the charge? Medicare covers most services but not devices. Be a smart consumer and remember that a vendor's job is to sell you something. Consult family or friends you trust before you make expensive purchases.

RESOURCES

Audio digital books, magazines and textbooks

- Public libraries
- U.S. National Library Service: 888-NLS-READ (1-888-657-7323), www.loc.gov/nls
- In Canada: CNIB: 800-563-2642, www.cnib.ca
- American Printing House for the Blind: 800-223-1839, www.aph.org
- <http://audiobiblesfortheblind.org/>
- Choice Magazines (bimonthly articles, unabridged): 888-724-6423
<http://www.choicemagazinelistening.org/>

Large print books, newspapers and checks:

- Public libraries.
- Checks/registers-your bank or check catalog
- New York Times Large Print Weekly: 800-NYTIMES (1-800-698-4637)
<http://homedelivery.nytimes.com>

Large print materials – crosswords, bingo cards, address books, calendars, etc:

- Independent Living Aids: 800-537-2118, <http://www.independentliving.com/>
- Learning Sight & Sound (LS&S): 800-468-4789, www.lssgroup.com
- Lighthouse International: 800-829-0500, <http://shop.lighthouse.org/>
- MaxiAids: 800-522-6294, <http://www.maxiaids.com>
- Optelec: 800-826-4200, <http://www.shoplowvision.com/>
- Perkins Products: <http://www.perkins.org/store/about/perkins-products-brand.html>
- Eschenbach: 800-487-5389, www.eschenbach.com
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Computer Enlargement

- Accessibility features built into your computer: <http://www.microsoft.com/enable/products/default.aspx>
- <http://www.apple.com/accessibility/>
- Magnification software: Ai Squared, www.aisquared.com

National organizations for support, information, and research updates:

- AMD Alliance International: 877-263-7171, <http://www.amdalliance.org/>
- American Foundation for the Blind: 800-AFB-LINE (232-5463), www.afb.org
- AMDF: www.macular.org
- CDC Fall prevention brochure
http://www.cdc.gov/HomeandRecreationalSafety/pubs/English/brochure_Eng_desktop-a.pdf
- Clinical trials <http://clinicaltrials.gov/>
- Hadley online courses:
<http://www.hadley.edu>
- Macular Degeneration Partnership: 310-623-4466, www.amd.org
- www.Macula.org
- MD Support: (816) 761-7080 (toll call),
www.mdsupport.org.
- National Eye Institute www.nei.nih.gov/
- National Federation of Blind, www.nfb.org;
news by phone 866-504-7300
- www.visionaware.org

Self-Help Books

- Macular Degeneration: The Complete Guide. Mogk & Mogk, Ballantine Books. 2003
- Making Live More Livable. Duffy. AFB. 2001
- The First Year – Age-Related Macular Degeneration. Roberts. Marlowe. 2006

Eligible Veterans: Contact U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: 877-222-8387
www.va.gov/blindrehab

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