

What is low vision?

Low vision is when you have lost a certain amount of eyesight. With low vision it is hard or impossible to do many of your normal tasks.

Low vision can happen at any age. While more common in older adults, normal aging itself does not cause low vision. You can have low vision because of eye injuries and accidents or inherited eye conditions. It can also be caused by conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Sometimes low vision can be improved with medication, surgery, eyeglasses or other options. If your low vision cannot be improved, there are ways to adapt. You can learn new ways to make the most of the vision you do have. Here are some things to know.

Vision rehabilitation: using the vision you have

Vision rehabilitation is when people with low vision learn how to do things in new ways. You can learn new ways to read, write or do tasks at home. Or you can learn to use certain low-vision aids. For

Vision rehabilitation professionals may work with you as a team.

This team may include:

- an ophthalmologist
- a low-vision specialist
- an occupational therapist
- a rehabilitation teacher
- an orientation and mobility specialist (helping you move around better)
- a social worker
- a counselor

Ask your ophthalmologist to find vision rehabilitation programs and specialists for you in your area.

example, there are different kinds of magnifiers for close work and telescopes for distance.

Low vision aids and techniques

There are many low vision aids and devices to help you with your daily activities. Talk with your ophthalmologist

or vision rehabilitation team about solutions for your specific needs. From talking watches to tablet computers, there are lots of low vision tools. Also ask if you will need training in how to use the devices.

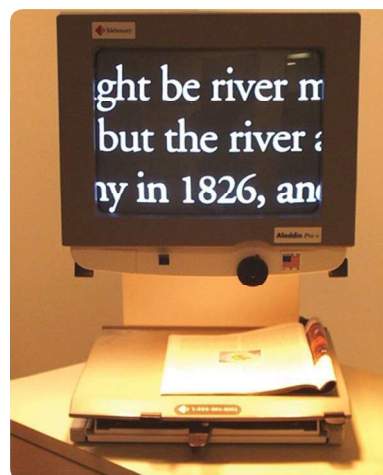
Here are some low vision aids:

Optical low vision aids. These use magnifying lenses to make objects look larger and easier to see. Optical vision aids include:

- **Magnifying spectacles.** Magnifying spectacles are worn like eyeglasses to keep your hands free. They can be used for reading, threading a needle, or doing other close-up tasks.
- **Stand magnifiers.** These magnifiers rest above the object you are looking at. This helps to keep the lens at a proper distance. Being on a stand also is helpful to people who have a tremor or arthritis. Some stand magnifiers have built-in lights.
- **Hand magnifiers.** There are magnifiers designed to help with different degrees of vision and can be held at various distances, although they cover a small field of vision. Some models have built-in lights.
- **Telescopes.** These are used to see objects or signs far away. Some telescopes can be attached to eyeglasses. Others are held like binoculars.



With today's tablet computers, you can change word size and adjust lighting.



Video magnifier

- **Video magnifiers.** These electronic devices make printed pages, pictures, or other small objects look bigger. You often can adjust them to meet your special vision needs. For instance, with some magnifiers you can add contrast to make printed words darker. There are a lot of new video magnifiers. Talk with your ophthalmologist about which ones can help you.
- **Large-print** books, newspapers, magazines, playing cards and bank checks.
- **Telephones, thermostats, watches and remote controls** with large-sized numbers and high contrast colors.

Low vision techniques help you do everyday tasks.

For instance:

- **Low vision devices.** These are designed to help with everyday tasks. They include:
 - **Audio books and electronic books.** With audio books, you can listen to text that is read aloud. With electronic books like Kindle®, Nook® and others, you can increase word size and contrast.
 - **Smartphones and tablets** let you change word size, adjust lighting and use voice commands. There also are many applications (apps) to choose from, such as programs that read material aloud.
 - **Computers** that can read aloud or magnify what is shown on the screen.
 - **Talking items** such as watches, timers, blood pressure cuffs, and blood sugar machines.
- Increase the amount of light in your house. Replace light bulbs with higher watt bulbs and add more lamps in lower-light areas.
- Reduce glare inside and outside. Adjust lights inside so they don't create glare. Shield your eyes by wearing a wide-brimmed hat or wrap-around sunglasses outside.
- Create more contrast around your house. Use a colored tablecloth with white dishes, for instance. Or put black contact paper on a desk where you have white papers.
- Use heavy, bold felt tip markers when you write shopping lists or take notes.

Summary

When you have low vision, there are many ways to use your remaining sight. There are vision rehabilitation specialists who help you learn to do things in new ways. There are also low vision aids, devices and techniques to help you do everyday activities.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

Watch a low vision video from the American Academy of Ophthalmology's EyeSmart program at aao.org/low-vision-link.

Low Vision Information and Resources

American Foundation for the Blind

Phone: 1.800.232.5463

Website: www.afb.org

Lighthouse Guild International

Phone: 1.800.284.4422

Website: www.lighthouseguild.org

National Federation of the Blind

Phone: 410.659.9314

Website: www.nfb.org

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped

Phone: 1.888.657.7323

Website: www.loc.gov/nls

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