



Low Vision

Over three million people in the United States do not have normal vision even with corrective lenses. If ordinary eyeglasses do not provide clear vision, one is said to have low vision. This should not be confused with blindness. People with low vision still have useful vision that can often be improved with low-vision devices.

Low vision can result from birth defects, inherited diseases, injuries, diabetes, glaucoma or macular degeneration. Although reduced central or reading vision is most common, a person can have low vision in their side (peripheral) vision, or a loss of color vision or contrast sensitivity.

Low vision devices or aides are available in optical and non-optical types. Optical devices use lenses or combinations of lenses to provide magnification. They should not be confused with standard eyeglasses. There are five main kinds of optical devices: magnifying spectacles, hand magnifiers, stand magnifiers, telescopes and closed-circuit television. Different devices may be needed for different purposes. If possible, try the optical device before purchasing it and be sure you understand how to use it.

The simplest non-optical technique is to bring the object of interest closer. Non-optical low vision devices include large print books, check writing guides, enlarged phone dials, talking appliances (timers, clocks, computers), and machines that scan print and read out loud.

Government and private agencies have social services available for people with low vision. For more information, contact the following resources:

American Academy of Ophthalmology Web Site www.aaopt.org

American Foundation for the Blind (800) 232-5463

National Association for Visually Handicapped (212) 889-3141

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (800) 424-8567

Lighthouse International (800) 334-5497

National Eye Institute (301) 496-5248

Prevent Blindness America (800) 331-2020

Visions/Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (212) 425-2255

Veterans may contact the Visual Impairment Services coordinator at their local VA facility.