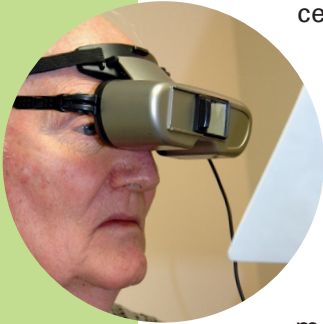




Research to Prevent Blindness

Advances in Eye Research: Low Vision

People who have low vision experience vision loss that cannot be corrected completely with eyeglasses, contact lenses, medications, surgery or other treatments. Low vision can affect central and side, or peripheral, vision and make it difficult to participate in everyday activities, such as reading, watching television and using the computer.



More than 4 million adults over the age of 40 in the U.S. are visually impaired or legally blind. Infants, children and young adults are affected by low vision as well, though in lesser numbers.

The total number of people with visual impairment is growing. It is estimated that low vision and blindness will affect 8 million people by 2050. In fact, low vision is among the most common causes of disability in the U.S.

Symptoms of reduced vision include difficulty recognizing faces, reading, cooking, selecting clothes that match, seeing clearly with the lights on, reading traffic signs and performing other similar visual tasks. Early signs of low vision can include loss of side, or peripheral, vision, which can prevent you from seeing obstacles or pedestrians to the side while walking or driving. You may also feel that you can't travel alone safely, and may be afraid of falling.

Risk Factors

Age is the biggest risk factor for low vision. It is most common in people over the age of 65 because the leading causes of low vision are age-related eye diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy.

Injury to the eye or to a portion of the brain involved in sight can also cause low vision, as can inherited vision conditions such as retinopathy of prematurity and albinism.



Prevention and Treatment

Low vision cannot be completely corrected, but you can take steps to prevent progression and treat it.

- An eye doctor can often see signs of serious eye disease before you notice symptoms. Regular dilated eye exams by an eye care professional are extremely important to prevent vision loss from all eye conditions.
- Smoking is a risk factor for many eye conditions, so quitting smoking can help you preserve your sight.
- If you have diabetes, maintain good blood sugar control to delay or prevent vision loss from diabetic eye disease.
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from damage due to ultraviolet light.
- Certain nutrients can also help improve and preserve your vision. Eat a diet high in dark, leafy and colorful vegetables and fruits, as well as omega-3 fatty acids found in fish, nuts and seeds.



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If you have been diagnosed with low vision, get your vision checked by a low vision specialist. Ask your eye doctor for a referral or consult American Federation for the Blind for local low vision services. Talk with a low vision specialist about how you can use your remaining vision to its fullest. Simple changes such as improving the lighting and reducing glare in your home and other surroundings may help you to see more effectively. You can also increase the visual contrast in objects that you use daily, such as putting your coffee in a white cup and using a dark, felt-tipped pen to write.

Modern technology is providing many ways to enhance the quality of life for people with low vision. You may be able to benefit from optical and electronic magnifiers, adaptive equipment such as speech recognition and computer navigation programs, special television systems, audio books and other independent living aids that allow you to perform everyday tasks more easily.

Low Vision Resources

Resources for Independent Living with Vision Loss

VisionAware: www.visionaware.org

Low Vision Information

National Eye Institute: nei.nih.gov/lowvision

Blind Rehabilitation Services

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: www.rehab.va.gov/blindrehab

Agencies Serving the Vision Disabled

American Foundation for the Blind: www.afb.org

Books and Magazines on Tape

American Printing House for the Blind: 800-223-1839; www.aph.org

National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped: www.loc.gov/nls

Free Guide Dogs in the U.S. and Canada

Guide Dogs of America: 818-362-5834; www.guidedogsofamerica.org

Free Eye Exams

EyeCare America: 877-887-6327; www.eyecareamerica.org

Low Vision Products

The Lighthouse Guild Store: 646-874-8384; shop.lighthouseguild.org

Maxi Aids: 800-522-6294; www.maxiaids.com

Invest in Your Vision

You can join RPB in supporting critical research in the fight against vision loss by sending your tax-deductible donation to the address shown below or online at www.rpbusa.org. RPB is a public 501(c)(3) foundation.



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360 Lexington Avenue, FL 22, New York, NY 10017-6528

800-621-0026 · 212-752-4333

www.rpbusa.org · inforequest@rpbusa.org

Since 1960, RPB has led a research effort to preserve vision and restore sight, supporting nearly every major development in the treatment of blinding disorders.