

Your Health and Safety Matters!



February is *Low Vision Awareness Month*

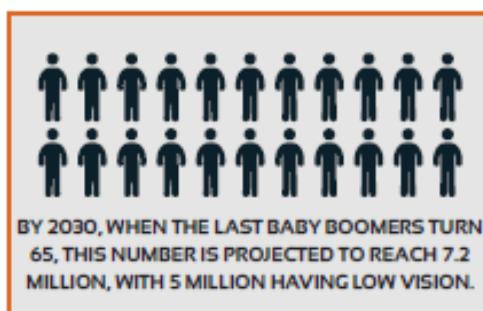
With people in the United States living longer, eye diseases and vision loss have become major public health concerns. Currently, 4.2 million Americans ages 40 and older are visually impaired. By 2030, when the last baby boomers turn 65, this number is projected to reach 7.2 million, with 5 million having low vision.

Low vision is a visual impairment that cannot be corrected by standard eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery. Having low vision can make activities like reading, shopping, cooking, writing, and watching TV hard to do. In addition, the consequences of vision loss may leave people feeling anxious, helpless, and depressed.

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Common vision problems as we age

Many people age without ever experiencing changes in their vision. But, there are some vision changes that are common with the natural aging of the eye, including difficulty seeing objects clearly, even close up; a decline in sensitivity, such as being able to distinguish colors like blue from black; and the need for more light. These changes can often be corrected with a new prescription for glasses or improved lighting. However, it is important for older adults to know the difference between changes that are normal and those that are not.



What are the most common age-related eye diseases and conditions?

The most common eye diseases and conditions that affect older adults include **age-related macular degeneration** (AMD), **cataract**, **diabetic retinopathy**, **dry eye**, **glaucoma**, and **low vision**. Many of these diseases and conditions do not have noticeable symptoms in their early stages, but they can be detected through a comprehensive dilated eye exam. Treatment is most effective when an eye disease is diagnosed early.



Why is it important to raise awareness about age-related eye diseases?

Many people think that vision loss is a normal part of aging and are unaware of what they can do to protect their sight. Lifestyle factors—such as not smoking; maintaining a healthy weight; engaging in physical activity; controlling diabetes; eating a healthy diet that includes fish high in omega-3s and dark, leafy greens; and protecting eyes from the sun—can all help prevent the onset or delay the progression of eye disease. **Comprehensive dilated eye exams** should also be a part of a person's routine health care, especially if he or she is over age 50.

What is low vision?

It is when—even with regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery—people find everyday tasks difficult to do.

What causes low vision?

Low vision is usually caused by—



Eye diseases or health disorders



Eye injuries



Birth defects



What "Low Vision" Means?

As we age, our eyes change too. In most cases, regular eyeglasses or contact lenses can correct many of these vision changes. However, if your eye doctor tells you that your vision cannot be fully corrected with ordinary prescription glasses, medication, or surgery and you still have some usable vision, you have what is called "low vision."

Having **low vision** means that even with regular glasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery, you may find it difficult to perform everyday tasks, such as reading your mail, shopping, preparing meals, and signing your name.

Signs and Symptoms of Low Vision

There are many signs and symptoms that can indicate low vision. For example, even with your regular eye glasses, do you have difficulty:

- Recognizing faces of your friends and relatives?
- Performing tasks that require you to see well up close, such as reading, crafting, making home repairs or organizing and labeling your clothing.
- Performing tasks at work or home because lights now seem dimmer?

What Causes Low Vision?

Among older persons, low vision can result from specific eye conditions, such as macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy from a stroke, or from a range of other eye conditions. Low vision can affect your ability to see people's faces, watch television, read, drive and use a computer.

What You Should Know about Low Vision

Having "low vision" is not the same as being "blind." For example, your doctor may tell you that you have a blind or blank spot in the center of your vision that limits your ability to read or see people's faces; nevertheless, you can still get around using your side (or peripheral) vision.

What is Vision Rehabilitation?

Vision rehabilitation helps people adapt to vision loss and maintain their current lifestyle. A vision rehabilitation program offers a wide range of services, including training in the use of magnifiers and other adaptive devices, ways to complete daily living skills safely and independently, guidance on modifying residences, and information on where to

locate resources and support. These programs typically include a team of professionals consisting of a primary eye care professional and an optometrist or ophthalmologist specializing in low vision. Occupational therapists, orientation and mobility specialists, certified low vision therapists, counselors, and social workers may also be a part of this team.

The sooner vision loss or eye disease is detected, the greater the chances of keeping the remaining vision.

Vision rehabilitation can help people with vision loss to maximize their remaining vision and maintain their independence and quality of life by teaching them how to:

- Move safely around the home.
- Continue to read, cook, and do other activities.
- Find resources, adaptive devices, and support.

Low Vision Resource Information:

- <https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health>
- <https://www.webmd.com/eye-health/eye-health-low-vision#1>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/visionhealth/basics/ced/index.html>
- <https://nei.nih.gov/lowvision>

<https://www.nei.nih.gov/learn-about-eye-health>

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www.BenefitsStore.com
(800)446-2663
Info@BenefitsStore.com
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