



Low Vision Rehabilitation

Helping you live independently

What is low vision?

Low vision can mean several things:

- You may have reduced **visual acuity**. This means you have trouble seeing small objects such as the letters on the eye chart in your eye doctor's office. Normal acuity is called 20/20 vision.
- You may have reduced **contrast sensitivity**. This means you have trouble seeing differences in shades, such as the edges of stairs, or details on people's faces, or white rice on a white plate in a dark restaurant
- You may have lost part of your **visual field**. People who have macular degeneration may be missing central areas of their visual field. People can lose areas of **peripheral vision** (side vision) from diseases such as glaucoma or a stroke.

Whatever the cause, if you have low vision it can be hard to do everyday activities because of your reduced vision.

Some people, such as those who have age-related macular degeneration, are disappointed to realize that their vision cannot be improved with regular glasses or surgery. In addition to vision problems, people with vision loss can become depressed. Other people have "phantom visions" (these are called Charles Bonnet hallucinations) and see things that are not actually there. People who have lost some vision are at higher risk of injury or falls.

What can be done about low vision?

If you have low vision you probably still have some usable vision, but you may need to find new ways to use it. Vision rehabilitation can help you do this. The first step in vision rehabilitation is to have a low vision assessment to fully understand your remaining vision and your needs. You will have a chance to try vision aids that will help you use your remaining vision. Vision rehabilitation is all about finding out what you need and what works for you.

Some examples of vision rehabilitation services:

- Helping an elderly person with macular degeneration and with good side vision make words on their computer monitor larger.
- Helping someone find a useful magnifier with a light to read a menu in a dimly lit restaurant.

Some examples of vision rehabilitation aids and devices:

- Hand-held magnifiers.
- Magnification in reading glasses.
- Telescopes.
- Video magnifiers, which use a video camera together with a screen to allow users to read enlarged print.
- Computer adaptations, which allow users to enlarge everything on the monitor, or to listen to what is on the screen.
- Audio books on tape, CD or that can be downloaded from a computer.

Vision rehabilitation also includes support such as:

- Helping you adjust to vision loss.
- Helping you move around in your home or community.
- Offering information about services such as support groups to help you and your family.
- Helping you find treatment if you are depressed.
- Helping you find other kinds of transportation if you cannot drive.
- Helping you prevent injuries, such as falls. This might involve an exercise program or making changes in your home.
- Educating you and your family about Charles Bonnet hallucinations.

How do I find vision rehabilitation services?

Many excellent vision rehabilitation services exist in Canada, and the specific services vary from province to province. There are CNIB offices across the country and your local CNIB office can help you to find vision rehabilitation doctors or specialists where you live. Your local CNIB can also offer services such as help with computers or the use of the CNIB library for audio or large-print books. (Also ask your local public library about audio books and large-print books.)

What does vision rehabilitation cost?

All provinces pay for the cost of a visit to an eye doctor (an ophthalmologist or an optometrist) for vision rehabilitation for seniors 65+. Some provinces pay part of the cost of aids. Be sure to ask if vision rehabilitation services in your community are free or whether there is a cost to you. Some aids may be available for loan.

Where can I get more information?

Ask your family doctor or eye doctor about low vision rehabilitation, and be sure to contact your local CNIB office.

You and your family can also visit these websites:

Canadian Ophthalmological Society

www.eyesite.ca

CNIB

www.cnib.ca

(Services)

Foundation Fighting Blindness

www.ffb.ca

Age-related Macular Degeneration

AMD Alliance

www.AMDCanada.com

AMD Alliance International

<http://www.amdalliance.org>

Canadian Association of Optometrists

<http://www.opto.ca>

<http://www.opto.ca/en/ehm/practiceResources.htm>

(Eye health)

Canadian Diabetes Association

www.diabetes.ca

Glaucoma Research Society of Canada

www.glaucomaresearch.ca

Health Canada

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/>

http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/iyh-vsv/life-vie/seniors-aines_vc-sv_e.html

Health Canada Fall Prevention

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/go_for_it/goforit_toc_e.htm

(A Guide to Choosing and Using Assistive Devices)

http://chp-pcs.gc.ca/CHP/index_e.jsp (Health Portal)

Seniors Mental Health

http://www.seniorsmentalhealth.ca/Seniors2SeniorsENG_17_06.pdf

(Seniors to Seniors' brochure about challenges of later life)

Public Health Agency of Canada

<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines>

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines/pubs/info_sheets/vision_care/index.htm

Institut Nazareth & Louis-Braille (INLB)

www.inlb.gc.ca

Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB)

www.mab.ca

National Eye Institute

www.nei.nih.gov

(What You Should Know About Low Vision)

Canadian Ophthalmological Society
1525 Carling Avenue, Suite 610
Ottawa, Ontario Canada K1Z 8R9

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