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More Older Americans Will Suffer From Low Vision, Here's How to Make Life Easier and Safer

The Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology and the American Academy of Ophthalmology offer tips to help people with low vision retain their independence

Kimberly, WI – The number of older Americans [with low vision is expected to double](#) in the coming years, as more people live longer. [Low vision](#) describes poor vision that can't be fixed or improved with glasses, contacts, or surgery. People with low vision have blind spots that can make it difficult or impossible to drive, read, or see faces. But the tragedy isn't that people have lost vision, it's that most believe nothing can be done to improve their quality of life. The [Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology](#) and the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#) are taking the opportunity of September's Healthy Aging Month to let people know they can retain their independence and stay safe, despite declining vision.

Age-related macular degeneration is one of the leading causes of low vision. Other common contributors include diabetic eye disease, glaucoma, and inherited retinal diseases. Whatever the cause, vision rehabilitation helps people make the most of the vision they have left so they can live as independently as possible.

“Low vision is a problem for many older Wisconsinites, one that makes it difficult for them to perform daily activities. With the aging of America, it's also a growing problem, but one that can be minimized at the personal level,” said David Nash, M.D. President of the Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology. “While low vision can't be fixed with glasses or other standard treatments, simple vision rehabilitation efforts can help impacted individuals make the most of the vision they have.”

The field of vision rehabilitation has advanced significantly over the years, offering more effective technologies and strategies. Today, ophthalmologists can offer solutions that range from a simple, portable video magnifier that can enlarge text and objects to high-tech glasses with cameras that allow people to read text and see faces.

But there are many simple changes people can make on their own to help them live better:

- **Improve contrast.** Put dark place mats under white place settings, buy rugs that are a contrasting color with the floor, and kitchen towels and cutting boards that contrast with the countertop. Use contrasting colored tape along the edges of rugs, stairsteps and lamp shades.

- **Improve lighting.** Every year, about 3 million older Americans are treated for injuries from falls, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Many of these falls are caused by low vision. Add lighting to staircases and dark hallways. Remove rugs from hallways to prevent tripping. Task lighting in the kitchen can also make food preparation safer and easier.
- **Reduce clutter and organize.** A cluttered house is more difficult to navigate and can contribute to falls and frustration. When each item has a specific place and is identified with a high-contrast label, it's easier to locate items needed for everyday living.
- **Embrace technology.** Books on tape and personal voice-activated assistants, like Google Home or Amazon's Alexa, can be enormously helpful for people who can no longer see well enough to read, dial a phone or set a thermostat.

Most importantly, see an ophthalmologist and a low vision specialist. An ophthalmologist can determine the full extent of vision loss and exact location of blind spots. Either the ophthalmologist or a low vision specialist can then determine the best techniques and devices that can help patients get around their individual challenges.

Unfortunately, many patients are referred for vision rehabilitation as a last resort and once their disease has advanced to a late stage. But it's most effective when introduced early in a patient's visual loss, so they can involve themselves in the process as they learn how to move around in their new world.

“The prospect of being unable to drive, read or see loved one’s faces is frightening and can lead some people to withdraw from life,” said John D. Shepherd, M.D., a clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. “While there isn’t one strategy or tool that works for every person, vision rehabilitation offers hope. It can help people stay in their homes and keep doing the things they love to do.”

For more information about eye health, visit the Academy’s EyeSmart [website](#).

About the Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology

The Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology (WAO) is a professional medical society comprised of Wisconsin ophthalmologists (medical eye doctors) who are committed to promoting quality eye care for the citizens of Wisconsin by providing its members with resources including professional education, legislative advocacy, and membership services to enhance the practice of ophthalmology in Wisconsin.

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