

Smartphones a big help to visually impaired

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iPhones and other smartphones can be a huge help to the visually impaired, but few vision doctors are recommending them to patients, according to a study co-authored by a Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine ophthalmologist.

Researchers surveyed 46 low-vision adults from the Chicago Lighthouse and the Spectrios Institute for Low Vision in Wheaton, Ill. Participants' best-corrected vision ranged from 20/70 to complete [blindness](#).

Researchers found that only 15 percent of patients reported that a vision doctor had recommended smartphones for the devices' accessibility features.

Eleven of the 46 patients (24 percent) used smartphones. Their average age was 36. Thirty patients (65 percent) used basic cell phones; their average age was 67. Five patients (11 percent) did not own any cell phones.

"Young, visually impaired patients are getting ahead of their doctors," said Loyola [ophthalmologist](#) Dr. Walter M. Jay, senior author of the study, which was presented at the 2012 ARVO Annual Meeting. "Low-vision specialists should be getting out in front on this, rather than being behind the curve."

Jay said these are among the accessibility features that smartphones offer to the visually impaired:

- Font sizes can be increased to as large as 56 pt., enabling users with very poor vision to text and email.
- The screen can be brightened considerably.
- GPS and voice features help the visually impaired to navigate.

"Smartphones can dramatically improve the quality of life of people with [poor vision](#)," Jay said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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