

New NIH resources help growing number of Americans with vision loss

February 1 2013

A 20-page large-print booklet and a series of videos to help people adapt to life with low vision are available from the National Eye Institute (NEI), a part of the National Institutes of Health. The materials were released during Low Vision Awareness Month, February 2013.

The booklet, Living with Low [Vision](#): What you should know, urges people with low vision to seek help from a low vision specialist and provides tips to maximize remaining eyesight, enabling them to safely enjoy a productive and rewarding life. The videos feature patient stories about living with low vision. Another video, targeted to [health care professionals](#), emphasizes the importance of informing patients with [vision loss](#) about vision rehabilitation services. The booklet and the videos were developed by the NEI National Eye Health Education Program (NEHEP).

Low vision means that even with regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine, or surgery, people find [everyday tasks](#) difficult to do. Reading the mail, shopping, cooking, and writing can seem challenging. The chief causes of vision loss in older people are age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, cataract, and glaucoma. Among younger Americans, low vision is most often caused by inherited eye conditions, infectious and autoimmune [eye disease](#), or trauma.

A 2012 report cosponsored by the National Institutes of Health estimates that 2.9 million Americans are living with low vision. The number is projected to increase 72 percent by 2030 when the last of the [baby](#)

[boomers](#) turn 65. Most people with low vision are 65 years old or older.

"I encourage anyone with low vision to seek guidance about vision rehabilitation from a low vision specialist," said NEI Director Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D. "For many people, vision rehabilitation can improve daily living and overall quality of life."

A low vision specialist is an ophthalmologist or optometrist who specializes in the care of patients with low vision. A low vision specialist can develop a rehabilitation plan that identifies strategies and assistive devices appropriate for a person's particular needs, which vary depending on the person's age and the source and severity of vision loss. As described in the booklet and videos, vision rehabilitation services include:

- training to use magnifying and adaptive devices
- learning new daily living skills to remain safe and live independently
- developing strategies to navigate inside and outside the home
- providing resources and support to help patients with vision loss

"A vision rehabilitation plan helps people reach their true visual potential when nothing more can be done from a medical or surgical standpoint," said Mark Wilkinson, O.D., a low vision specialist at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics and a NEHEP planning committee member. "Vision rehabilitation can make a world of difference to a person adjusting to vision loss and should be considered part of the continuum of care. I urge health professionals to help their patients with low vision seek vision rehabilitation services."

The NEI is committed to finding new ways to improve the lives of people living with visual impairment. The NEI currently dedicates more than \$24 million to research projects aimed at low vision. Projects

include learning how the brain adapts to vision loss, strategies to improve vision rehabilitation, and the development of new technologies to help people with low vision read, shop, and find their way in unfamiliar places.

Statistics on low vision are taken from the report, 2012 Fifth Edition of Vision Problems in the U.S., available on the NEI website at <http://www.nei.nih.gov/eyedata>. The new NEI booklet and videos along with other resources for people with low vision can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.nei.nih.gov/lowvision>.

Spokespersons, including NEI researchers, low vision specialists, and people with low vision, are available to speak to the press.

Provided by National Eye Institute

Citation: New NIH resources help growing number of Americans with vision loss (2013, February 1) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-02-nih-resources-americans-vision-loss.html>

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