

Living Well with Eye Disease



The single best thing you can do to promote eye health and wellness is having regular comprehensive eye exams so signs of eye disease can be caught early.

Wellness Tips for Eye Health

Overall health and good eye habits benefit the health of your eyes. Eating well, exercising regularly, and quitting smoking also minimize risk for diseases that can impact eye health, such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or hypertension.

Clean Eye Handling Practices

When handling your eyes, steps should be taken to reduce risk for eye infections.

- Wash your hands before touching your eyes, especially if you are putting in or taking out contact lenses.
- Review proper care of contact lenses, including proper storage and cleaning. Replace lenses with a fresh pair according to the recommendations on the label. Avoid sleeping in any contact lenses unless otherwise specified by your provider.
- Apply eye makeup safely, using products that will not irritate, damage, or expose eyes to bacteria.
- Avoid touching the tip of eye drop bottles or makeup applicators to the eye or eyelashes when using these products.

2 out of 3 contact lens wearers are women³



Makeup Application

Many women apply cosmetics near or around the eyes, so it is important to do so safely – taking care to minimize exposure to bacteria and harsh chemicals, and avoiding physical damage to the eye.

Tips to protect your eyes when applying makeup:

- Replace eye makeup frequently (every 3 months) to minimize bacterial growth, particularly in liquid products.
- Avoid sharing eye makeup directly with others to reduce contamination, and use clean applicators for store samples.
- Avoid applying eye liner inside the eye lash line which may block the tear ducts.
- Clean your face and eyelids before applying eye makeup, and always remove makeup before bed.
- Consider the source of your makeup and research the listed ingredients, selecting trustworthy products with few or no harsh chemicals. Chemicals in eyelash enhancing serums and anti-aging creams applied around the eye can contribute to dry eye.

Wearable Eye Protection

Protecting your eyes from damage will promote long-term health and help manage symptoms of eye disease.

- Sunglasses protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation
- Safety eyewear shields your eyes from harsh chemicals, dust, debris, or other objects during cleaning, construction, home renovations, lawn and garden work, or while playing sports



Looking at digital screens for extended periods of time can tire and dry out your eyes.

**The 20-20-20 Rule:
Take a break every 20 minutes to look at something approx. 20 feet away for 20 seconds. This gives your eyes a break and reminds you to blink!**

Foods that Promote Eye Health

Eating a balanced diet will provide your eyes with the nutrients they need. Certain foods have added benefits for eye and vision health:

- **Dark, leafy greens** (e.g., spinach, kale) have lutein and zeaxanthin, nutrients known to have eye benefits, including reducing risk for cataracts. Egg yolks are also a great source of these nutrients.
- **Cold-water fish** (e.g., salmon, tuna) have omega-3 fatty acids, which can help with dry eye and reducing inflammation.
- **Fruits and vegetables high in Vitamin C** (e.g., oranges, grapefruit, strawberries, papaya, green peppers, tomatoes) may help reduce risk for cataracts and contribute to slowing the progression of AMD.
- **Vegetable oils, nuts, and sweet potatoes** all have Vitamin E, a nutrient known for its ability to fight [free radicals](#) and protect healthy tissue.
- **Oysters, eggs, and whole grains** contain zinc, which is an important nutrient for keeping your [retina](#) healthy.



Living with Impaired Vision

A vision impairment or low vision diagnosis can be challenging. Reduced vision has been associated with feelings of frustration, depression, anxiety, and loneliness. However, there are resources and support systems available to empower high-quality living. Many [assistive and adaptive devices](#) and aids have been designed to make daily activities, such as reading and cooking, easier with impaired vision. It's important to remember that adapting to low or impaired vision will take time. Be patient with yourself as you navigate new daily routines.

Some household products and technologies can be adapted to aid your low vision.

- Applications and accessibility options that enlarge content size or dictate text (e.g., on mobile phones and tablets)
- Large-print or larger-than-normal products (e.g., for playing cards and clocks)
- Adjusted or sharpened color contrast (e.g., with computer monitors)

Low vision aids that can be prescribed by your doctor:

- Anti-glare lenses
- Light-filtering lenses
- Magnifiers

Individuals living with eye disease often need to navigate complexities with insurance coverage, engage with multiple health care providers, and experience difficulties completing everyday activities independently. Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself concerning what you need to successfully manage your personal eye care journey.



Magnifiers are devices that may use lenses or a camera to make things look bigger. From a simple magnifying glass to advanced electronics that digitally enlarge images, magnifiers can be hand-held or wearable to fit your needs.

70% of adults with significant vision loss are not employed full-time¹⁰
12.4% of working adults with visual disability are uninsured¹⁰

Vision rehabilitation programs cover a range of services that can help adjusting to life with low vision such as:

- Training for use of assistive and adaptive devices and technologies
- Coaching on ways to complete daily living skills safely and independently, including indoor and outdoor travel
- Counseling and providing information on resources and support to help cope with vision loss
- Guidance on modifying your home to make it safer and more accessible
- Advice on adapting your work environment or career to a low vision lifestyle

Individuals may find it helpful to utilize mental health resources to adjust to life with impaired vision.

Professional counseling and peer-to-peer emotional support during this time can be great tools for developing coping skills and tactics to manage vision loss. See the [Resources and Support Groups](#) section of the SWHR Guide to Women's Eye Health.

Providing Assistance for People with Impaired Vision

What is a Caregiver?

Anyone who is supporting another person with daily activities and/or medical needs is a caregiver. Some caregivers may be **formal caregivers**, including paid providers, licensed workers, and others associated with a formal service system. Many caregivers are **informal** – friends, relatives, and community members who provide care without compensation.

Up to 20% of the U.S. population serve in a part-time or full-time caregiving role¹¹

There are many resources and support systems for both patients and caregivers. Below are some areas to consider when providing formal or informal assistance for someone who has impaired vision:

- Home environment – Assistance may be needed to make changes in the home (or frequently visited spaces) that will make it easier to navigate and improve comfort for those living with impaired vision.
- Daily living activities – Incorporate physical touch and verbal cues to help with executing daily activities, especially in unfamiliar spaces or for activities that are more challenging to do with impaired vision (e.g., encouraging a loved one to hold onto your arm while walking, announcing an approaching staircase or curb, or describing a chair while allowing them to touch it before seating themselves).
- Vision-assistive devices – Invest time into learning how to use vision-assistive services, aids, and medical devices with your friend or loved one. This will offer them support, as well as help you gain a better understanding of their needs.
- Transportation – If a person with low vision can no longer drive, it may not be feasible for you to always give them a ride. Discuss other methods of transportation, such as public transportation or a local ride-share program, as well as pedestrian safety and navigation strategies for traveling on foot. It is important to assess their desire and ability for independence and how it aligns with the features of their transportation options.
- Advocacy at doctor's office – Offer to accompany your friend or loved one to their doctor appointments, so that you may support their care journey. Other ways to support while there include taking notes or asking questions that will ensure they are getting the care they need.
- Find your support – Connect with others who understand and can lend support to you and your loved one as you both navigate their physical and mental health care journey. Low-vision counselors, online communities, and in-person social events are a few examples of some invaluable resources to support caregivers.

It's important to remember that adapting to low or impaired vision will take time. Be patient with the person you are caring for (and yourself) as you navigate new daily routines. Talk with them about their needs and feelings about the care they receive on a regular basis because their needs may change over time.

Caregivers of individuals with impaired vision may also be at risk of mental health conditions, as the burden of providing physical and emotional support can be overwhelming. See the **Resources and Support Groups** section of the SWHR Guide to Women's Eye Health for additional low vision and caregiving resources.