Now You See It—Now You Don't

Coping With Your Vision Loss

Information on Resources and Services for Low Vision & Blind Individuals

Compiled by members of the Heartland Council of the Blind, an affiliate of the Oklahoma Council of the Blind

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Purpose of Notebook

So You Have Just Heard the News!
Your Eyes Will Never Improve!
Where Do You Turn?
Even The doctor Can't Tell You!
How Do You Manage With Your Vision Loss?

The purpose of this notebook is to provide you, as a person who is interested in obtaining more information about how to help yourself or a family member with vision loss to obtain a better quality of life & information to help you. This information was developed by individuals who are members of the Heartland Council of the Blind, an affiliate of the Oklahoma Council of the Blind, consumer organizations that are

made up of individuals with vision loss who are here to assist you in coping with your vision loss and need for resources and services.

Questions & Solutions

After we have discovered that our vision loss will not improve, we may need to find some answers to some questions that are burning in our minds. Maybe some of these questions and answers listed below will help.

<u>What can I do now that I have a visual loss?</u>

You can do anything you want to do, provided you learn the adaptive skills needed to accomplish the task. There is a wealth of information that you can tap into from local agencies such as the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Visual Services or national organizations such as American

Foundation for the Blind, American Council of the Blind, as well as our local consumer groups. All of these group's addresses and phone numbers will be provided to you in a separate section of this notebook.

Talk to individuals with vision loss; you can share some of the best practical tips and techniques because they've had many of the same experiences. It is also important to use every technique and piece of equipment available to increase the usefulness of your remaining vision.

How can I stay involved with my family and friends?

You are the same person you were before your vision loss occurred. The

problem is that many people don't know how to interact with others who have vision loss. They may not know how to help. They may be afraid to ask questions. Explain how things look to you and what situations cause the most difficulty for you. Give specific instructions if you ask for help. As you become comfortable with your vision loss, others will as well. When you learn the skills necessary to remain independent, you will feel more confident, which often has a beneficial effect on relationships with family and friends.

How can I meet other people with similar vision problems?

Organizations and support groups for members who are blind or have vision losses, such as the Heartland Council of the Blind, which holds a monthly meeting the first Saturday of the month, or support groups that are specialized to a specific eye disorder are available to offer support and suggestions to assist you. There will be a section of these groups listed in this notebook.

I can't drive. What kind of transportation is available?

When you can't drive, transportation options can be limited in Oklahoma, depending upon where you live. To find out what's available in your community, call (800) 845-8476 to locate the rehabilitation teacher in the Division of

Visual Services office that serves your area. This person will know about transportation in your community. The Area wide Aging Agency may also have transportation information. To find the office nearest to you, phone the Department of Human Services' Senior Info Line at (800) 211-2116 or your local Community Action agency.
You can also call the 2-1-1 service to inquire as to what transportation services are available in your area.

Surgery and regular glasses won't help. How can I make the most of my remaining vision?

You might think of contrast such as placing light objects on dark surfaces & vice versa, to see if the contrast helps

you locate items or perform various tasks. Try using more than one source of light and adjusting blinds and draperies to make the best use of natural light.

Also you can explore low vision options and there are individuals that can assist you in making decisions on the proper devices that will assist you in reading and accomplishing daily living tasks. These can be as simple as a hand-held magnifier to a more complicated CCTV, all of which need proper training to obtain the best maximum use from the device. Lighting is very important and finding a good light source can be done through a good low vision examination. You can be referred by your doctor for this examination.

I'm losing my vision. How can I stay in my own home and not be a burden to my family and friends?

With the correct training and equipment, most people can continue to take care of themselves at home. Simple changes can adapt your house, the equipment or tools you use and the tasks of daily living so you can remain as independent as possible. There are usually several ways to successfully deal with problems, but the solutions must be individualized because no two people have the same type and degree of vision loss.

There are individuals such as Certified Rehabilitation Therapists or Occupational Therapists, who deal with low vision, can instruct you on practical techniques to help you with meal preparation, home management, personal care, walking safely inside your home, organizing and labeling medications, adaptive reading and writing and other skills.

Also, you can ask an individual who is visually impaired and using adaptive skills in their own life how they manage and what types of ideas they might have that would assist you in your life. A number of resources for locating assistance will be listed in this notebook.

How can I get around safely in spite of my vision loss?

Orientation & Mobility Instructors help you learn to move around your own home and travel safely in your community. They can instruct you on specific techniques that help you travel safely to your mailbox, the neighbor's house, grocery store across town and more.

There are devices, such as telescopes, sunglasses and canes that assist you in walking independently, traveling with others or using public transportation.

Here are some safety tips to help you in your own home:

- **Make sure hallway and stairwell lighting is well lit.**
- **Use railings when using stairs.**
- **Mark the leading edges of each step on runners and risers with two to three inches of paint or nonskid material that contrasts with the color of the stairs.**
- **Remove area rugs.**
- **Move furniture and electrical cords away from the main traffic areas.**

- Replace worn carpeting, using contrasting colors to make doorways and stairs easier to see.

- Also use contrasting colors of paint to make it easier to locate light switches, electrical outlets, doorknobs and appliance dials.

- Use nonskid products to clean and polish floors.

- Keep closet and room doors fully open or fully closed, not half open.

If I can't read print, how do I stay informed?

Many people with vision loss rely more on television and radio news. The Division of Visual Services operates the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, which provides free books, magazines and other materials on audio cartridge along with the equipment needed to play the cartridges. There is no charge to mail materials to or from the Library. Professional librarians, who advise readers and order materials, may be reached at (405) 521-3514 in Oklahoma City, (800) 523-0288 toll free or (405) 521-4672 TTY/TDD for individuals who are deaf.

NEWSLINE is a program which allows you to access local and national newspapers over your phone. For more information and to obtain an application for this program, you can contact the Library.

The Library also operates the Oklahoma Telephone Reader (OTR). OTR content includes news and editorials, sports, grocery ads, obituaries and a variety of other information not normally available on radio and/or television news sources. You can call the Library to sign up to obtain the codes to use this system.

Do I need to learn Braille?

Braille is not necessary but highly recommended when you are unable to effectively read print. Braille becomes more important as your vision decreases. It is one of the most useful forms of obtaining and maintaining information. Many individuals learn enough Braille to take down phone numbers, play cards and label household items. You must desire to learn Braille, which will require the development of a certain amount of sensitivity in your finger tips. There are a number of ways that you can obtain information about Braille, which can be found in the resources listed in the notebook.

What services are available for people with vision and hearing loss?

The Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services operates the Telecommunication-Equipment Program for Individuals with Vision and Hearing Loss, a program to help Oklahomans with vision and hearing loss. The Department of Visual Services has a Deaf/Blind Coordinator who can assist Individuals with a severe hearing and vision loss as they learn to live independently with special instruction in adaptive techniques and devices that improve communication and personal safety.

For more information call or TTY: (405) 522-1475.

How can I use a telephone without dialing the wrong numbers?

The buttons on a touch-tone telephone are arranged in a pattern that you can memorize and use by touch and usually the number five has a raised dot in the middle. Big button telephones are available with two-inch buttons and numbers that are easy to read.

There are so many choices for cell phones, large text or talking features and so it is always best to find a person who is knowledgeable in that area before selecting a phone. Try one to make sure you can hear and/or see it first.

How can I label and organize medications?

Develop a labeling system that is safe and easy to use for identifying individual medications. For example, you can use different sized bottles or raised dots or letters on the bottles. Some people purchase medication organizers that have morning, noon, evening and bedtime compartments with the days of the week printed in large, raised letters.

Some pharmacies are getting products such as ScripTalk, which has a small pre-recorded disk on your medication bottles that will have all your information. You place the bottle on the ScripTalk device and it will read this information to you. As your medication

changes, so will the instructions on the disk.

How do I identify my money and write my checks?

You can fold bills in different ways based upon their value. You can learn to recognize coins by size and whether they are smooth or rough around the edges. Notice that your penny and nickel have a smooth edge and your dime and quarter have a rough edge. Many people use this method: One dollar bills are left unfolded; fives are folded in half so they are nearly square; tens are folded in half lengthwise to form a rectangle; and twenties can be folded like tens and then folded in half again.

You can continue to write your own checks by using a check-writing guide, which is a plastic card with slots that are open so you feel where to put your pen and write. You can also order checks through the bank that have raised lines, or you can bank online if you have access to the Internet. Other types of writing guides, techniques and technology are available to assist people with vision loss in handling their banking.

How can I eat out in public without embarrassment?

To locate items around your plate, place the tips of your fingers on the table top, palms toward you, and gently move your

hands away from you until you touch the item with the back of your hand. Learn to locate food with your eating utensils. A piece of bread can be used to locate food and push it onto your utensil.

It may be convenient to ask restaurant staff to cut your meat in the kitchen before serving the meal. Restaurant staff or someone eating with you can identify items on the table and food on your plate by comparing their location to the numbers on a clock. For example, the person might say, "Your coffee is located at two o'clock; your roast beef is located between nine and twelve o'clock."

Just relax; people are not looking at you, as they are enjoying the company of

their friends and worrying about their own messes.

Can I still enjoy social and recreational activities?

Yes, you may have to do some things differently, but individuals who are blind can enjoy most of their favorite activities. Adaptations can be made to assist you in playing cards, games and sports activities. The Heartland Council offers bowling on the second Saturday of every month and information can be found in the resource list.

How do I shop?

Shopping independently is not an impossible task. If you want the manager or a store clerk to help locate items and to read prices, you may want to call ahead or shop at a time when the store isn't busy. Some stores deliver merchandise, or you can shop online if you have access to the Internet.

Prepare labels in advance to attach to grocery items while shopping or label items with sighted help as soon as you return home. These labels can be in large print, Braille or any other preferred method.

Remember, if you use an individual to assist you, give them a tip, as it does

take their time away from assisting others; if they work on a commission, that means time and people are money.

How can I recognize food items and read the instructions for food preparation?

Food packages may be labeled in various ways, including large print, Braille, embossed labeling tape, raised letters made with puff paint, or using a varying number of rubber bands.

If you are unable to read food preparation instructions, you will need sighted help. Keep these instructions in a permanent form by writing them in large print, Braille or some type of recording. There are new technology

devices that help with this task and the technology changes often.

How can I continue to cook safely?

Certified Rehabilitation Therapists, Occupational Therapists trained in low vision, or a good visually-impaired cook can help you to learn the proper techniques in safety kitchen skills. Here are a few tips that may be helpful in working safely in your kitchen:

- **When you are cooking, don't be distracted by other tasks or conversations. For safety and efficiency, focus on the recipe and steps in the cooking process.**

- It is not safe to lean over the burners to look closely at the settings. Many people mark the most frequently used appliance settings with raised dots or in contrasting colors by using household items such as glue or brightly colored paint or nail polish.

- Always have a specific place to lay sharp or hot items when working in the kitchen.

- Always close your cabinet doors and drawers.

- Carry knives and other sharp or pointed items by the handles, holding them by your side with points down.

- Clean up spills immediately to avoid accidents.

- If you don't feel confident with the oven or burners, a microwave can be a good alternative until you are confident with your stovetop or oven.

Here are a few tips that may be helpful in preparing a meal:

- Because vision loss frequently causes difficulty with depth perception, wear short sleeves or roll up your sleeves when using the oven and burners.

- Plan your menu before you start cooking so you can place all the items next to your workspace.

- When you're pouring cool liquid, hook your index finger over the lip of a cup and stop pouring when liquid reaches your finger. If the liquid is hot, be sensitive to the temperature change as the liquid rises. You can also listen for the change in sound as the container fills up so you can stop when it reaches the desired level. Practice over an area that will catch spills.

- To be more organized and efficient, measure all the ingredients before you begin combining any of them.

- Rather than pouring spices or extracts into measuring spoons, place the spices or extracts in small bowls or wide-mouth jars. Then dip the measuring spoon into spices or extracts.

- Use a timer to determine when food is done, or, with experience, tell whether food is done or not by changes in smell, sound or texture, which can be felt with a spatula or tongs.

- Center pans on the burners before turning them on. Put handles consistently to the left or right, away from the burners.

- Never leave forks or spoons in pots or pans.

- Make a place for pans before taking them off the stove or out of the oven.

- Be sure to turn off the oven and burners before removing food.

How can I match my clothing?

One way to organize clothing is to place items in a specific location and to return these items to the same place. Hang all pieces of an outfit together including the accessories. You can mark clothing with safety pins, different shaped buttons or tactile labels by attaching them in specific garment locations such

as the hem or label tags. An example of this method would be to place two safety pins in each item of clothing that can work together. Matched socks can be held together in a drawer or while washing with plastic sock rings available from drug stores. Put dividers in drawers to separate items. Over time, you may become accustomed to recognizing some of your clothing by touch.

How can I continue sewing?

Self-threading needles and special needle threaders are available for both hand sewing and sewing machines. Some people use a lighted magnifier on a stand or a special sewing machine

magnifier attached above the pressure foot.

Also you can place a piece of tape down past the line of the seam gauge so you can line up your material long before you reach the pressure foot. The main thing to remember is to go slow. Practice first on something that requires a straight seam.

Can I Still Do My Job? What kind of jobs can people with vision loss do?

The Division of Visual Services has a vocational rehabilitation program which helps people find appropriate employment or keep the jobs they have. Oklahomans with vision loss work in almost every profession, such as

accountants, health care professionals, teachers, attorneys, travel agents and more. To locate the Division of Visual Services office nearest to you, please phone (800) 845-8476. The toll free number may also be used for TTY/TDD calls by individuals who are deaf.

There is more new technology and special equipment available today than ever before to help people make the most of their remaining vision. Visual Services' Rehabilitation Technology Lab for Blindness and Low Vision provides evaluations of individuals' needs, demonstrations of technology and allows individuals to try out technology that may help them reach their employment goals.