



Getting Started Guide: Navigating Life with Vision Loss



Rehabilitation teachers showing a large print crossword puzzle book (top photo) and teaching cutting skills (right photo).

Learn more about vision rehabilitation services in Section 4.



Welcome

If you are reading this guide, you or someone you care about may be experiencing changes in vision. Feeling uncertain or unsure of what comes next is common. Vision loss affects people differently, and while this experience may feel unfamiliar, you are not alone.

What This Guide Is — and What It Is Not

This guide was created by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH) ConnectCenter as starting point to help you understand your options, connect to support, and begin building skills for everyday life. It is not meant to be read all at once. Move forward at your own pace starting with sections that seem most relevant right now.

It also provides practical information and links to trusted resources for family members, friends, and professionals who want to offer support.

This guide is not a medical textbook, a list of products to buy, or a step-by-step checklist you must complete.

How to Use This Guide and Where to Start

Everyone's experience with vision loss is different. You might begin with:

- **Understanding Vision Loss**

If you are new to vision loss or want help making sense of terms like low vision or legal blindness.

Cover photo: family looking photos on an electronic tablet.

- **Emotional Adjustment and Well-Being**
If you are feeling overwhelmed, uncertain, or adjusting emotionally to changes in vision.
- **Support from Family, Friends, and Professionals**
If you are supporting someone with vision loss or want guidance on how others can help.
- **Core Principles for Daily Living**
If you are looking for practical ideas that make everyday tasks easier and safer.
- **Home, Reading, Technology, or Travel Sections**
If you want help with specific activities such as cooking, reading, using technology, or getting around.

Links appear in selected sections to more detailed information and services through APH ConnectCenter.

Take your time. This guide is here to support you.

Beyond Diagnosis

Vision loss is both a medical issue and a functional one. What matters most is not just a diagnosis, but what you can still see, how you use your remaining vision or other senses, and what skills or strategies support everyday life.

Many people with vision loss continue to read, cook, work, travel, and stay connected by a learning process that is called vision rehabilitation. Like physical or occupational therapy, vision rehabilitation focuses on building skills and confidence, not on fixing your eyes.

A Simple Roadmap: Four Early Steps

Many people find it helpful to think in terms of a few beginning steps, which can be taken in any order and revisited over time. The APH ConnectCenter, along with this guide, can help you explore each of the steps when you are ready.

- 1. Start with your eye care professional** (such as an ophthalmologist or optometrist) to understand your eye condition and discuss treatment or follow-up care.
- 2. Consider a low vision evaluation** to learn how to make the most of your remaining vision.
- 3. Explore vision rehabilitation services** to build practical skills for daily living, mobility (getting around), reading, and technology.
- 4. Connect to support and resources**, including peer support, community services, and trusted information.

You Are Not Expected to Do This Alone

Adjusting to vision loss takes time and is a process. Some days may feel easier than others.

The sections that follow offer guidance on emotional adjustment, daily living skills, technology, mobility, recreation, and support from others.

Section 1: Understanding Vision Loss and Functional Vision

Vision loss can be confusing, especially when you hear unfamiliar terms or receive a diagnosis that doesn't clearly explain what daily life may look like. A helpful first step is understanding how vision loss is described—and how those descriptions relate to everyday living.

Vision loss exists on a continuum, ranging from mild vision changes to more significant vision loss, including blindness. Experiences vary widely and may be influenced by factors such as eye condition, age, lifestyle, and available support.

Functional Vision: What Matters Most Day to Day

When adjusting to vision loss, it's important to understand both your medical diagnosis and your functional vision: what you can still see and how you use your remaining vision or other senses to do the things that matter in your daily life.

Functional vision is different for everyone. For example, someone who is legally blind may be able to use a magnifier to read large print, recognize faces at close range, or navigate familiar spaces. Others with less vision may rely more on touch, hearing, or technology.

Legal Blindness: Definition and Impact

The term “legal blindness” refers to a clinical definition used primarily to determine eligibility for certain services and benefits. It doesn't necessarily mean a person sees nothing at all.

In the United States, legal blindness is generally defined as visual

acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Many people who are legally blind still have some functional vision.

This classification can affect access to services or certain legal considerations, such as driving, but it does not define a person's abilities or potential.

Low Vision Explained

Many people experience significant vision impairment that does not meet the definition of legal blindness. This is commonly referred to as low vision. Even with glasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery, everyday tasks such as reading or navigating spaces may still be difficult.

Low vision can include blurry vision, reduced central or peripheral vision, difficulty with contrast, or sensitivity to light. Understanding the specific type of vision loss you are experiencing can help you learn strategies that make daily tasks easier and safer.

Learn More About Eye Health and Eye Conditions

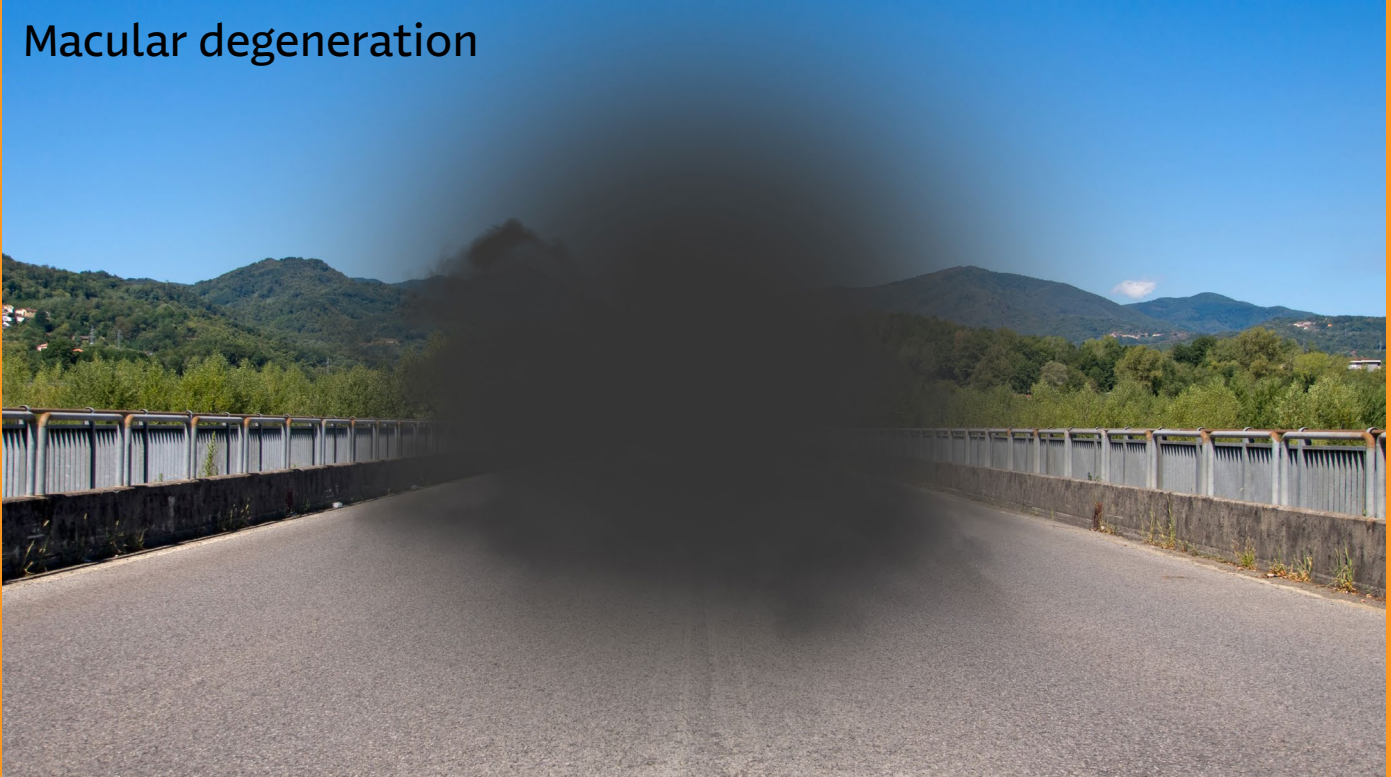
More information about specific eye conditions is in the Eye Conditions Glossary available through APH ConnectCenter.

Link: [Eye Conditions Associated with Blindness and Low Vision – ConnectCenter](#)

Link: [Eye Health and Vision Changes – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: It is important to understand functional vision and how to use your remaining vision and adapt daily tasks in ways that support independence and safety.

Examples of what someone with different eye conditions sees.



Top glaucoma comparison photo courtesy: National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health (NEI/NIH).

Section 2: Emotional Adjustment and Well-Being

Experiencing changes in vision can be both an emotional process and a physical one. It's common for vision loss to affect how people feel about themselves, their autonomy, and their future. These responses are a normal part of adjusting to change.

Common Emotional Response

People experiencing vision loss may notice feelings such as sadness, grief, frustration, anxiety about safety or independence, anger about needing help, or uncertainty about the future. Some people may also minimize changes as a way to cope.

These responses are understandable. Vision loss often requires rethinking daily life, and that process takes time. As people learn new skills and connect to support, many move toward greater confidence and acceptance.

Why Emotional Support Matters

Emotional well-being plays an important role in adjusting to vision loss. Support may come from family members, friends, vision rehabilitation professionals, mental health professionals, or peers with similar experiences.

Connecting with others who understand vision loss – through peer support groups, phone-based programs, or online communities – can reduce isolation and build confidence. Individual counseling can also be helpful, especially during periods of significant stress or transition.

If emotional distress begins to interfere with daily life, sleep, relationships, or decision-making, reaching out for professional support can be an important step.

Adjustment Is a Process

Adjustment does not happen all at once; there is no fixed timeline. Emotions come and go, and some days may feel easier than others. Setbacks are normal. Learning practical skills, such as safer ways to move around, read, cook, or use technology, may reduce frustration and increase a sense of control.

Recognizing personal strengths, such as problem-solving, persistence, and the ability to ask for support, can also support adaptation over time.

For Family Members, Friends, and Supporters

Vision loss also affects the people who care about someone experiencing it. Supporters may feel concern or uncertainty and want to help.

Listening, asking questions, and respecting the person's choices are often more helpful than taking over. Read more in Section 3.

Key Takeaway: Emotional adjustment is a normal and ongoing part of vision loss. With time, skill-building, and connection to others, you may regain confidence and continue to lead an active, meaningful life.

Section 3: Support From Friends, Family, and Professionals

This section is for family members, friends, caregivers, and professionals who want to offer support in ways that are helpful, respectful, and empowering, but may not know how.

Start With Respectful Communication

Clear, respectful communication is the foundation of good support.

- Identify yourself verbally when approaching someone who is blind or low vision.
- Speak directly to the person, even if they are accompanied by someone else.
- Use normal speaking voice unless asked to speak louder. Vision loss does not affect hearing.
- Let the person know when you are leaving a room or ending an interaction.

Simple communication habits help reduce confusion.

Offering Help Without Taking Over

Many people with vision loss value autonomy and want to remain actively involved in their daily lives. Support works best when it is collaborative.

- Ask before helping and respect the answer, even if help is declined.

- Offer specific options, rather than general offers. For example, “I can help organize the kitchen this afternoon.”
- Allow space for the person to try tasks on their own when they choose.

Support should expand choices, not replace them.

Human Guide Technique: Walking Together Safely

When guiding someone who is blind or low vision, proper human guide technique supports safety and comfort.

- Offer your arm and allow the person to hold your elbow or upper arm.
- Walk at a comfortable pace, staying about a half step ahead.
- Describe changes in terrain, narrow spaces, steps, or obstacles before reaching them.
- Never push, pull, or steer the person by their body or clothing.
- Ask for feedback to make sure the pace and guidance feel right.

Briefly explaining what you are doing and why can be helpful, especially if the person is unfamiliar with this technique.



Example of human guide technique.

Respecting Personal Space and Organization

As covered in Section 5, consistent and predictable organization helps people navigate their environment safely and independently. Examples include:

- Ask before moving items.
- If something must be moved, explain where it will be placed.
- Avoid rearranging furniture or belongings without discussion.

Encouraging Learning and Continued Engagement

As discussed in Section 4, vision rehabilitation services help people learn new ways to complete daily tasks. Supporters can encourage participation without pressure by being patient, learning techniques together when appropriate, and respecting personal timing and choices.

Vision loss does not mean giving up meaningful activities or contributions. Encouraging involvement in daily routines, hobbies, social activities, and new interests supports confidence and a sense of purpose.

Link: [New to Vision Loss? - ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Support is most effective when it is respectful, collaborative, and focused on helping maintain your self-sufficiency. Clear communication, thoughtful guidance, and encouragement of skill-building help you continue to live active, self-directed life. Find out more in the following sections.

Section 4: Vision Rehabilitation Services — Learning New Ways to Do Things

Vision rehabilitation services are designed to empower people with vision loss continue to live safely, independently, and confidently. Rather than focusing on “fixing” eyesight, vision rehabilitation focuses on learning skills, strategies, and adaptations that support daily life.

Many people find that vision rehabilitation plays a central role in adjusting to vision loss — much like physical or occupational therapy helps people regain skills after an injury or illness.

What Vision Rehabilitation Focuses On

Vision rehabilitation helps individuals learn practical ways to manage everyday tasks, using a combination of remaining vision, other senses, tools, and techniques. Services are tailored to each person’s needs, goals, and lifestyle.

Vision rehabilitation may support:

- Daily living skills, such as cooking, personal care, and organizing the home
- Getting around safely at home and in the community
- Reading, writing, and managing information
- Using phones, computers, and other technology
- Adjusting emotionally and building confidence
- Continuing to work or exploring new employment options

Not everyone needs every service, and needs may change over time.

Who Provides Vision Rehabilitation Services

Vision rehabilitation services are provided by trained professionals who specialize in different aspects of vision loss. These may include:

- **Low Vision Specialists**, who assess functional vision and recommend strategies or devices
- **Vision Rehabilitation Therapists**, who teach daily living skills and adaptive techniques
- **Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists**, who teach safe travel skills
- **Assistive Technology Specialists**, who teach the use of phones, computers, and other technology
- **Counselors or Social Workers**, who provide emotional support and help with adjustment
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals**, who support employment goals

These professionals often work as part of a team, focusing on practical outcomes that matter to the individual.

Link: [Understanding Vision Rehabilitation – ConnectCenter](#)

When to Consider Vision Rehabilitation

There is no single “right time” to begin vision rehabilitation. Some people start soon after diagnosis, while others seek services when daily tasks become more difficult.

You may consider vision rehabilitation if everyday activities feel harder, if you want to learn new ways to read, cook, use

technology, or get around safely, or if you want support adjusting to vision changes. Participation is voluntary, flexible, and guided by your goals.

How Vision Rehabilitation Connects to Daily Life

The core principles described in Section 5 — lighting, contrast, organization, labeling, safety, and skill-building — are often taught and reinforced through vision rehabilitation. Learning new techniques can reduce frustration, increase independence, and improve quality of life.

Finding Vision Rehabilitation Services

Vision rehabilitation services are available through rehabilitation agencies, healthcare systems, vocational rehabilitation programs, and community-based services. APH ConnectCenter helps people locate reliable information and connect with vision rehabilitation services and resources nationwide.

Link: [Blindness and Low Vision Support Resources - ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Vision rehabilitation services focus on learning skills and strategies that support independence, safety, and self-confidence. Depending on the state and agency these services are personalized, flexible, and available to people across the vision spectrum.

Section 5: Core Principles That Make Daily Tasks Easier

Many daily challenges related to vision loss can be addressed using a small set of practical principles. These principles apply across many activities, from cooking and reading to organizing your home and using technology.

You do not need to apply all of these at once. Even small changes can make everyday tasks safer, easier, and less frustrating.

Lighting: Use Light Intentionally

Good lighting is one of the most important tools for people with low vision.

- Use task lighting for activities such as reading, cooking, or writing. Adjustable lamps that can be directed where needed are often helpful.
- Position lights to reduce shadows, often from behind or over your shoulder.
- Avoid glare by keeping light sources out of your direct line of sight and using lampshades or diffusers.
- Use window coverings, such as blinds or curtains, to control natural light.

Lighting needs may vary by task, time of day, and individual eye condition.

Contrast: Make Important Things Stand Out

Contrast helps objects stand out from their background and increases safety.

- Use high contrast between objects and surfaces, such as dark items on light backgrounds or light items on dark backgrounds.
- Choose dishes, cutting boards, towels, and household items that contrast with counters, tables, or floors.
- Highlight edges and important areas — such as steps, door frames, or appliance controls — using contrasting colors or tactile markers.

What works best varies by person, so experimenting can be helpful.

Organization: Keep Things Predictable

Consistent organization supports safety and independence.

- Keep frequently used items in consistent locations.
- Reduce clutter, especially in walkways and work areas.
- Group similar items together and return items to their usual place.

Predictability makes tasks easier and reduces frustration.

Labeling and Marking: Use Sight, Touch, or Sound

Labeling helps identify items quickly and accurately.

- Use large print, tactile markers, braille, or audio labels as needed.

- Label items such as medications, food containers, appliances, and files.

Not everything needs a label — sometimes shape, size, or texture is enough.

Examples of labeling canned goods.



Safety: Reduce Risks Before Problems Occur

Safety is closely tied to lighting, contrast, and organization. In addition to the earlier suggestions:

- Keep walkways clear and secure loose rugs.
- Use non-slip mats in bathrooms and kitchens.
- Ensure stairs and transitions are well lit and clearly marked.
- Take extra care with heat, sharp tools, and chemicals.

Small adjustments can prevent injuries and increase self-confidence.

Skill-Building: Learn New Ways to Do Familiar Things

Vision loss often requires learning new techniques, not giving up activities.

- As noted in Section 4, vision rehabilitation professionals teach adaptive techniques for daily living, getting around safely, reading, and technology.
- Skill-building is an ongoing process, which improves practice. Progress looks different for everyone.

Link: [Redesigning Your Home and Fall Prevention - ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Lighting, contrast, organization, labeling, safety, and skill-building form the foundation for managing your daily tasks with vision loss. These core principles appear throughout the rest of this guide and can be applied in many areas of life.



Example high contrast kitchen tools.

Section 6: Home, Kitchen, and Daily Living Skills

Vision loss can affect how you move through your home and complete everyday tasks.

Creating a Safer, More Navigable Home

Your home environment plays an important role in safety and confidence.

By applying the core principles described in Section 5 — lighting, contrast, organization, labeling, safety, and skill-building — many people continue to be able to be self-reliant and manage their daily activities safely.

Some people find it helpful to review their home intentionally

— or with a vision rehabilitation professional—to identify areas where simple changes can improve safety. You do not need to make every change at once.

Kitchen Skills and Meal Preparation

Cooking and meal preparation can often be adapted with a few practical strategies.

- Use contrasting cutting boards, dishes, and utensils.
- Keep commonly used items in consistent locations.
- Mark appliance controls using tactile or high-contrast markers.
- Taking extra care with heat, sharp tools, and hot liquids.

Learning adapted cooking techniques can increase confidence and reduce the risk of injury.

Managing Personal Care and Daily Routines

Daily routines such as grooming, dressing, and managing medications can often be simplified through organization and consistency.

- Store personal care items in predictable locations.
- Use labeling or tactile cues to identify medications and products.
- Establish routines that reduce the need to search visually.

Predictable routines can make daily tasks feel more manageable.

Home Maintenance and Simple Repairs

Many people with vision loss continue to handle basic household tasks with preparation and attention to safety over speed.

- Organize tools and materials before starting a task.
- Use good lighting and contrast in work areas.
- Take time to explore the workspace using touch as well as sight.
- Ask for help when a task feels unsafe or overwhelming.

Link: [Living with Blindness or Low Vision – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: By applying core principles and learning adapted techniques, you can continue to manage your home and daily routines safely and independently. Small changes can lead to greater confidence and comfort.

Example task lighting use.



Section 7: Reading, Writing, and Managing Information

Changes in vision may affect how easily you read print, fill out forms, manage mail, or keep track of important information, but many tools and strategies can help. Reading, writing, and managing information are essential for autonomy and staying connected. Keep in mind the core principles outlined in Section 5.

Adapting Your Reading Environment

Small changes to how and where you choose to read are important to consider.

- Use task lighting that is positioned to reduce shadows and glare.
- Choose reading surfaces and materials that provide good contrast.
- Adjust viewing distance and angle to reduce eye strain.
- Take breaks as needed to reduce fatigue.

Reading needs may vary depending on the task, time of day, and lighting conditions.

Low-Tech Tools for Reading and Writing

Many people find that simple, non-electronic tools are effective and easy to use. Examples include:

- Large print materials, such as books, newspapers, and labels
- Reading stands, which hold materials at a comfortable angle

- Line guides which help keep place on a page and reduce visual glare
- Bold-line pens and high-contrast, bold-line paper
- Writing on a non-slip, high-contrast surface
- Using guides or templates to keep writing aligned
- Using signature guides to sign documents accurately

These tools can improve comfort and accuracy without requiring advanced technology.



Using a signature guide.

Managing Mail, Paperwork, and Information

Organization of personal information helps you maintain independence and reduces frustration.

- Sort mail and paperwork regularly.
- Use consistent systems for storing important documents.
- Label files, folders, and containers using large print, tactile, or audio labels.
- Use calendars, notebooks, or reminders to track appointments and tasks.

Choosing systems that fit your habits makes them easier to maintain.

Technology Options for Reading and Writing

Technology can expand access to printed and digital information in many ways. Some people use:

- Screen magnification or text-to-speech features on phones, tablets, and computers

- Video magnifiers to enlarge printed materials
- Audiobooks, available through talking book machines or accessible apps
- Scanning and optical character recognition (OCR) tools that convert print to digital text

Technology choices are personal. Training and practice can make technology more useful and less frustrating. Section 8 has more information on technology.

Braille as an Option

For individuals with significant vision loss, braille offers a tactile way to read and write.

Braille can be used for labeling, taking notes, managing lists, reading books, and accessing digital information through braille displays. Some people learn braille later in life and find it valuable for certain tasks.

Learning braille is a personal choice and may be explored with support from vision rehabilitation professionals.

Link: [Daily Living Skills – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: You can continue to read, write, and manage information using a combination of environmental changes, low-tech tools, and technology.

Section 8: Technology and Tools That Can Help

Technology can support communication, access to information, and daily tasks for people who are blind or low vision. Tools range from simple devices to more advanced digital solutions, and many people use a combination over time.

Learning and Using Technology Successfully

Technology is most helpful when paired with training and practice.

Support and guidance make technology more effective and easier to use.

Technology choices are personal. What works best depends on your goals, comfort level, and access to training and support to help you learn at your own pace. Technology continues to evolve. Some people enjoy staying up to date, while others prefer to use familiar solutions.

Ways to Learn More Include

- Connecting with vision rehabilitation agencies and technology specialists
- Exploring trusted information sources focused on accessibility and assistive technology
- Attending workshops, webinars, or community events when available

Built-In Accessibility on Phones and Tablets

Many smartphones and tablets include built-in accessibility

features that can be customized to individual needs.

Both Apple (iOS) and Android devices offer features such as:

- Screen magnification and zoom
- Screen readers that read on-screen content aloud
- High-contrast display options and color filters
- Voice control and voice assistants
- Text-to-speech for messages, documents, and web content

Learning to use these features can expand self-reliance and reduce the need for using specialized devices.

Other Technology Options

Some people use additional tools to support specific tasks, such as:

- Video magnifiers for reading print
- Audio or tactile tools for labeling and organization
- Navigation or way-finding tools to support safe travel
- Adaptive keyboards, braille displays, or other input devices
- Digital assistants, smart speakers, or smart glasses

Staying Informed About New Technology

APH ConnectCenter can help you with reliable information and resources related to accessible technology.

Links: [Products and Technology – ConnectCenter](#)
[Blindness and Low Vision Support Resources – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Technology offers you simple or advanced options to support independence, communication, and access to information and can be adapted to fit different needs and comfort levels.

Desktop video magnifier and computer screen magnification examples.



Section 9: Recreation and Leisure

Vision loss does not mean giving up activities you enjoy or connections that matter. You can continue to participate in hobbies, social activities, and community life by adapting how they take part or exploring new interests.

Staying engaged supports emotional well-being, confidence, and a sense of purpose.

Staying Active and Engaged

Physical activity supports both physical and emotional health. Many people continued to enjoy movement and exercise through adapted approaches. Examples include:

- Walking, swimming, yoga, or fitness programs that focus on verbal instruction
- Adaptive or inclusive sports such as goalball, beep baseball, tandem cycling, or guided running

Exploring options through local recreation programs or vision rehabilitation agencies can help identify activities that feel accessible and enjoyable.

Reading, Music, and Cultural Activities

Many cultural and entertainment activities remain accessible and adapted formats.

- **Reading** through audiobooks, large print, digital text, or braille
- **Music** through listening, playing instruments, singing, or participating in choirs

- **Movies and television** using audio description services that narrate visual elements
- **Museum, theaters, and performances** that offer tactile exhibits, audio guides, or sensory-friendly experiences

Public libraries and community organizations often provide access to accessible formats and programs.

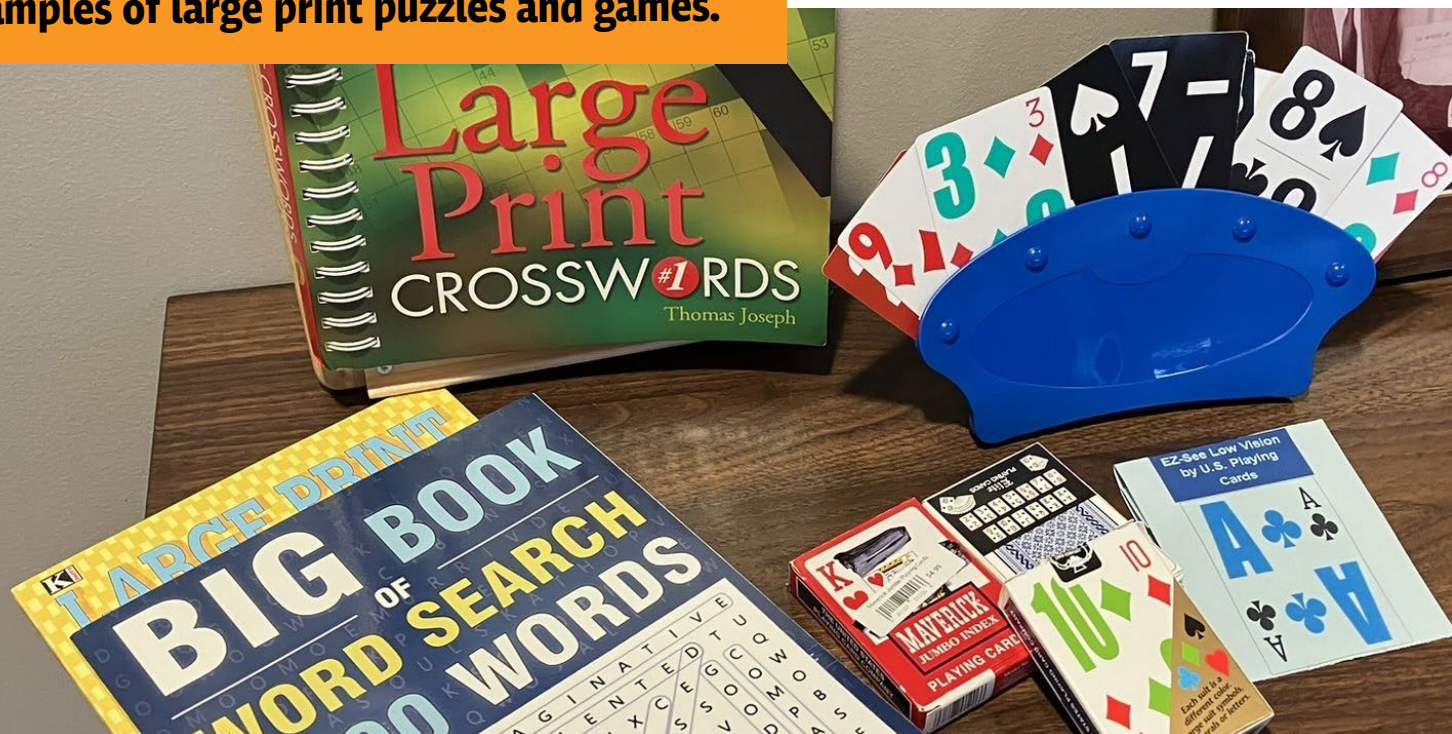
Creative Hobbies and Personal Interests

Creative activities can provide relaxation, self-expression, and a sense of accomplishment. Many people enjoy:

- Knitting, crocheting, quilting, or sewing using tactile techniques
- Pottery, sculpting, woodworking, or other hands-on crafts
- Writing, journaling, or storytelling using adaptive tools
- Photography or visual arts using adapted methods

Creativity is highly personal, depending on your interests.

Examples of large print puzzles and games.



Gardening and Outdoor Activities

These activities can be both accessible and rewarding.

- Raised beds, container gardens, or vertical planters can reduce physical strain
- Tactile markers and consistent layout support orientation
- High-contrast labels help identify plants and tools

Spending time outdoors can support mental well-being and connection to nature.

Social Interaction and Community Participation

Social connection is a key part of leisure and fulfillment.

- Participating in clubs, faith communities, or volunteer activities
- Attending social events or group activities
- Connecting with peer groups focused on shared interests

Many communities offer in-person and virtual opportunities that support participation regardless of vision level. Don't be afraid to engage.

Link: [Recreation and Leisure if Blind or Low Vision – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Recreation and leisure are not extras — they are essential parts of a meaningful life. With creativity, flexibility, and support, you can continue to enjoy activities that bring you purpose and joy.

Section 10: Traveling Independently and Getting Around

Being able to move through your community supports your participation in daily life. Vision loss may change how you travel, but it does not mean giving up mobility or freedom.

Adjusting When Driving Is No Longer an Option

Losing the ability to drive can be one of the most challenging changes associated with vision loss. It may affect routines, employment, social activities, and a sense of autonomy. These feelings are valid and common.

While driving is one form of independence, it is not the only one. Many people find that learning alternative transportation strategies allows them to stay connected and active in their communities.

Bioptic Driving: An Option for Some People with Low Vision

In some states, bioptic driving may be an option for individuals with certain types of low vision. Bioptic driving involves wearing eyeglasses with small telescopes mounted above the regular lenses. The telescopes are used briefly to view distant details, such as signs or traffic signals.

Becoming a bioptic driver requires:

- A comprehensive low vision evaluation
- Specialized training with a certified driving rehabilitation specialist
- Meeting specific state licensing requirements

Bioptic driving is not appropriate for everyone and is highly regulated. A low vision specialist can help determine whether it is an option to explore.

Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Training

O&M training teaches skills for traveling safely and independently.

O&M specialists help individuals learn:

- Safe indoor and outdoor travel techniques
- Use of long white cane or other mobility tools
- How to navigate sidewalks, crossings, and public spaces
- Strategies for using public transportation
- Route planning and problem-solving skills

O&M training is personalized and can be adapted to individual comfort levels and goals.

Transportation Options in the Community

Many people use a combination of transportation options, depending on location and needs. Common options include:

- Public transportation, such as buses, trains, and subways
- Paratransit services for people with disabilities
- Ride-sharing services, accesses through apps or phone-based services
- Volunteer driver programs offered by community organizations
- Walking with a cane or guide dog, when appropriate

Learning how to use these options safely and confidently is often part of vision rehabilitation services.

Planning for Traveling

Independent travel often involves planning ahead. Helpful strategies include:

- Allowing extra time when traveling to new places
- Using consistent routes when possible
- Learning how to ask for assistance when needed
- Carrying a phone or emergency contact information

Self-confidence grows with experience, practice, and support.

Link: [Orientation and Mobility: Getting Around – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Although vision loss may change how you travel, many options exist to support safe and independent mobility. With training, planning, and access to transportation resources, people who are blind or low vision continue to move through their communities with confidence and purpose.



Woman at bus stop with her guide dog.

Section 11: Living with Both Vision and Hearing Loss

This section is intended for individuals who experience both vision and hearing loss, sometimes referred to as dual sensory loss or DeafBlindness, as well as for family members and professionals who support them.

Understanding Dual Sensory Loss

Some individuals experience vision loss first, followed by hearing loss later in life. Others may experience both at the same time or from birth. Dual sensory loss affects people in different ways.

Challenges may include:

- Difficulty receiving information through sight or sound
- Increased safety concerns when navigating environments
- Barriers to communication with others
- Risk of social isolation without appropriate support

All of these challenges need to be considered when developing strategies.

Communication Strategies

Effective communication is central to independence and connection.

Depending on individual needs, communication strategies may include:

- Tactile communication, such as tactile sign language or hand-over-hand methods

- Close-range communication, allowing use of remaining vision or touch
- Clear speech, when some hearing remains, with attention to background noise
- Written or digital communication, using large print, high contrast, braille, or accessible technology
- Assistive listening or communication devices, when appropriate

Environmental Supports and Safety

Thoughtful environmental adaptations can improve safety build self-confidence, and reduce risk. Helpful strategies may include:

- Consistent organization of living spaces
- Controlled lighting to reduce glare and maximize usable vision
- Tactile markers to identify doorways, pathways, or changes in level
- Vibrating or visual alerting systems for alarms, phones, or doorbells
- Keeping walkways clear and predictable

Assessing the environment is critical in determining additional strategies.

Specialized Services and Resources

People with combined vision and hearing loss benefit from services designed specifically for dual sensory needs. Learning and practicing communication strategies often involves trained

professionals who specialize in dual sensory loss. Two key national resources include:

- **Helen Keller National Center (HKNC):** Provides comprehensive rehabilitation and training for individuals who are DeafBlind, focusing on communication, independent living, employment, and community participation. Services are available to youth (16+), adults, and older adults, as well as families.
- **iCanConnect:** This program provides free communication equipment and training to eligible individuals with combined vision and hearing loss. Equipment may include smartphones, tablets, computers, braille displays, and other assistive technologies, along with personalized training.

APH ConnectCenter can help direct individuals to these and other specialized resources.

Link: [Dual Sensory Loss Resources – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: Living with combined vision and hearing loss can present you with unique challenges related to communication, mobility, and access to information. With the right individualized strategies, environmental supports, and specialized services, you can continue to live an active, connected, and meaningful life.



Using an assistive hearing device.

Resources

Support, information, and services for people who are blind or low vision are available from many organizations and programs. Rather than listing every possible resources here, this guide focuses on helping you find the right resources at the right time.

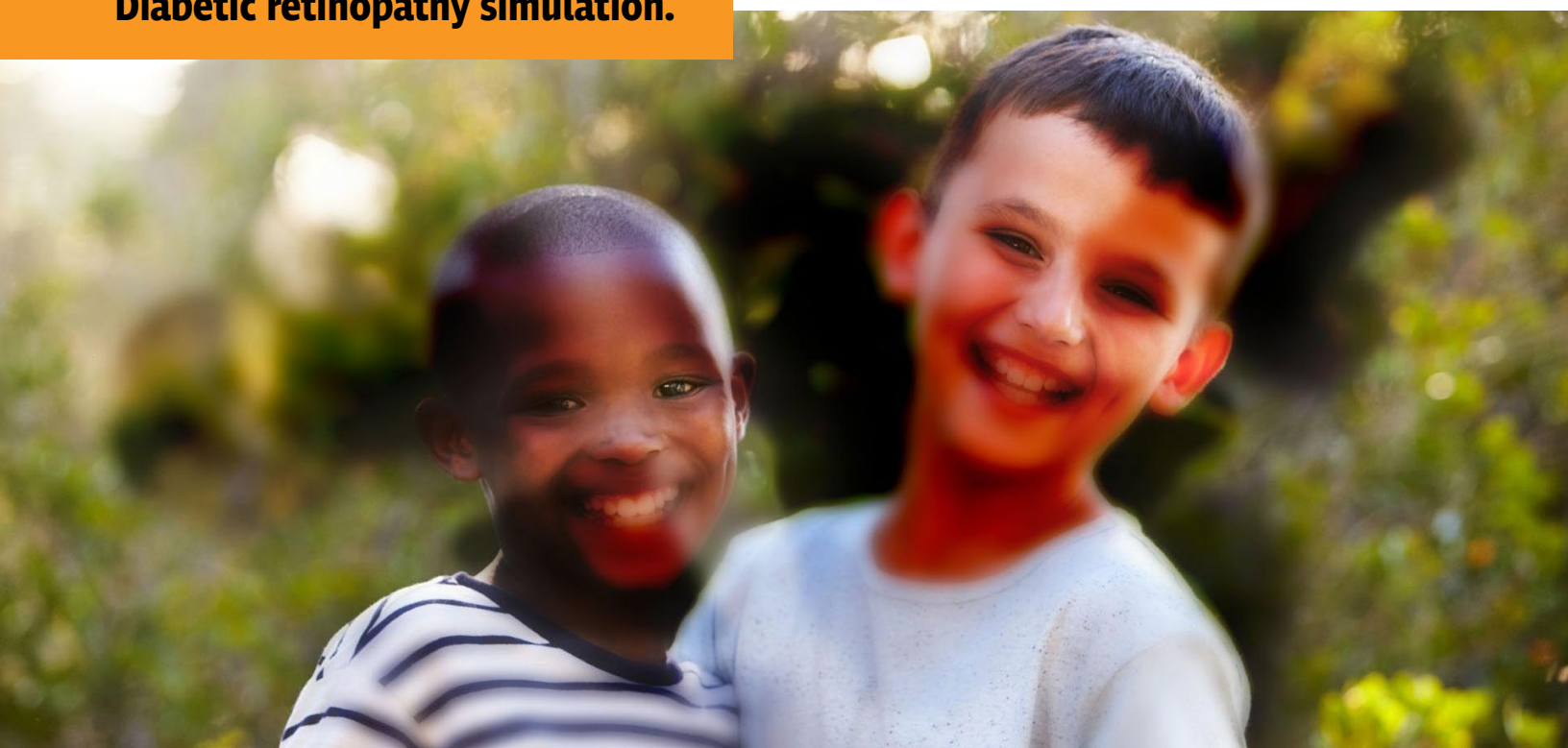
Eye Conditions and Diagnoses

Understanding your eye condition can help you communicate with eye care professionals and make informed decisions about care. However, medical information alone does not define what you can do day to day.

APH ConnectCenter offers a comprehensive Eye Conditions Glossary that explains common eye conditions, diagnoses, and related terms in clear, accessible language.

Link: [Eye Conditions Glossary – APH ConnectCenter](#)

Diabetic retinopathy simulation.



Finding Services and Support Through APH ConnectCenter

The APH ConnectCenter provides current, relevant information about blindness and low vision in one place including the following:

National Organizations and Programs

National organizations such as the American Council of the Blind and National Federation of the Blind provide education, advocacy, training, and community connections. Many have state or local affiliates. These include organizations focused on:

- Peer support and community engagement
- Advocacy and civil rights
- Independent living and employment
- Accessible information and media

Learning, Adjustment, and Peer Support

Some organizations focus specifically on helping people adjust to vision loss through education, discussion groups, and skill-building opportunities. These programs may offer:

- Workshops and classes
- Peer discussion groups
- One-on-one support
- Resources for family members

Many programs are available remotely by phone or online, making them accessible regardless of location.

Diabetic retinopathy simulation photo on previous page courtesy: National Eye Institute, National Institutes of Health (NEI/NIH).

Links to Specific Articles and Resources

- Find nationwide services and resources: [Blindness and Low Vision Support Resources – ConnectCenter](#)
- Explore daily living strategies: [Daily Living Skills – ConnectCenter](#)
- Learn about vision rehabilitation services and training: [Understanding Vision Rehabilitation – ConnectCenter](#)
- Connect to peer support information: [Support Groups: Their Role in the Adjustment Process – ConnectCenter](#)
- Access information for families and professionals: [Family, Friends, and Professionals – ConnectCenter](#)
- Find out about medication management: [Medication Management for Blind & Low Vision: Tips, Tools, and Safety – ConnectCenter](#)
- Learn about employment options and more: [CareerConnect® – ConnectCenter](#)

Key Takeaway: You do not need to navigate vision loss alone or search everywhere for reliable information. APH ConnectCenter can help you and those who support you find the help you need through our comprehensive resources.

About This Guide

Getting Started: A Guide for Navigating Life with Vision Loss is a publication of the **American Printing House for the Blind (APH) ConnectCenter** and is available only online in English and Spanish. A shorter version, *Top Five Tips for Navigating Vision Loss*, is available as a printable PDF online.

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APH's mission is to empower people who are blind or low vision by providing accessible and innovative products, materials, and services that support lifelong success. This guide is one way that ConnectCenter helps people take informed, confident steps forward.



**AMERICAN
PRINTING HOUSE
FOR THE BLIND**

Back cover photo: Person using a white cane.



NO STOPPING
ANY TIME
→

