



Adjusting TO VISION LOSS

by Denise Jess

It took a visit from her children to make Betty Zajicek realize how dark it was in her apartment. Betty was diagnosed with macular degeneration, and didn't realize how large of an impact the lack of light had on her independence.

A certified vision rehabilitation therapist provided lighting recommendations that made a big difference. "The LED lights make it a lot brighter in the apartment," says Betty. "Before if I spilled something, I could not see that I spilled it. I would end up stepping in it or tracking it around. Now I can see well enough to clean up the mess."

Betty is not alone when it comes to adjusting to age-related vision loss. According to Family Caregiver Alliance,

nearly 3.5 million Americans age 40+ have some degree of vision loss, and this number is expected to double in the next few decades as baby boomers grow older.

Most people with age-related vision loss experience partial loss. Eye diseases, such as macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy, can have a significant impact on functional abilities and quality of life. Finding new ways to accomplish daily tasks as vision changes occur can lead to significant improvements in quality of life.

Vision Rehabilitation

A vision rehabilitation therapist can address vision-loss challenges. They'll

visit home, work, or school, asking questions to determine the impact of vision loss on daily activities. They'll recommend potential solutions, provide instructions on using adaptive skills and assistive devices, introduce new approaches to common tasks, and present suggestions for a safe environment.

Vision rehabilitation services are provided in Dane, Sauk, Richland, Grant, Lafayette, and Iowa Counties through the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired (OBVI) provides one-on-one rehabilitation services throughout the state. Therapists

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work to understand a person's vision function to help them achieve their goals and, ultimately, their independence. People who have worked with a vision rehabilitation therapist improve their quality of life by regaining functional abilities, improving reading and distance vision, and using low-vision devices.

As an example, Betty loves to cook and bake, but her vision loss made it difficult for her to read recipes. After finding some of the best handheld magnifiers available, she could bake again and participate in social activities.

"We have potlucks here once a month," Betty says. "I always make something for that." Betty also signed up for the talking book program from the Wisconsin Talking Book and Braille Library and learned about adaptive products with large bold print, such as a large-print address book, a large-print wall calendar, and pens that write in big bold lines.

More Support

A vision rehabilitation therapist will provide adaptive instruction.

- Adapting the home for safety and navigation
- Improving lighting conditions
- Preparing meals
- Labeling medications, clothing, and appliances
- Writing
- Keeping financial records
- Shaving or applying makeup
- Using magnifiers for easier reading
- Making phone calls
- Training to use a tablet, home computer, or cell phone

Additional Tips

- Seek services that help with the adjustment to vision loss, such as Wisconsin Council of the

Blind & Visually Impaired and OBVI. Services include in-home rehabilitation, assistive technology training, and low-vision evaluation.

- Stay physically active.
- Avoid isolation and loneliness by spending time with family, friends, and other community members.
- Think positively and proactively.
- Learn to recognize depression and seek treatment.
- Visit an eye doctor regularly. The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends individuals age 65+ get a dilated medical eye exam every year or two, or as recommended by their ophthalmologist.

It can be hard to notice age-related vision loss as it occurs over time, so it's worth evaluating regularly. You'll appreciate the increased quality of life for years to come.

Denise Jess is the executive director of Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired.



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

(800) 783-5213
wcbblind.org

Office for the Blind & Visually Impaired

(888) 879-0017
dhs.wisconsin.gov/blind

CHIROPRACTIC CARE

BOOTS CHIROPRACTIC & WELLNESS CENTER, S.C.
(920) 997-9700
bootschiropractic.com

CHRONIC CONDITIONS & SUPPORT

Listings include various national, state, and local resources. See also the Palliative Care category in this section.

ALS ASSOCIATION
WISCONSIN CHAPTER
(414) 763-2220
alsawi.org

AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION
diabetes.org

AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION
(800) 242-8721
heart.org

AMERICAN PARKINSON DISEASE ASSOCIATION (APDA)
apdaparkinson.org/community

ARTHRITIS FOUNDATION
Wisconsin Office
(414) 321-3933
arthritis.org/wisconsin

DIABETIC SUPPORT GROUP
Aurora Health Care
(920) 907-7000

FOND DU LAC COUNTY SENIOR SERVICES
Living Well with Chronic Conditions
(920) 929-3114

MY CHOICE WISCONSIN
10201 W. Innovation Dr., Ste. 100
Wauwatosa 53226
(800) 963-0035
mychoicewi.org/ja

My Choice Wisconsin provides government-funded programs to frail seniors, adults with disabilities,