

Making the Most of Your Remaining Vision

Register using a self check-in kiosk in the main entrance of the Centennial or Dickson Buildings, Victoria General site. Next, go to the Eye Care Centre in the Centennial Building, 2A.

Making the Most of Your Remaining Vision

Losing your sight can be upsetting. You may feel scared, sad, or frustrated – this is normal. It may help to talk with your family about your feelings and let them know what they can do to help you. Don't be afraid to reach out to others with vision loss, or to health care professionals for information and advice.

You can live a happy, fulfilling life. Losing your sight does not have to mean giving up activities—you can make changes and learn new ways to stay active and social.

What are the types of vision loss?

Central vision

This is the detailed vision that lets us see shapes and colours clearly. The macula (a special area in the back of the eye) is responsible for central vision. Damage to the macula can cause central vision loss, leaving you with only peripheral (side) vision.

Causes of central vision loss include:

- › Macular degeneration
- › Diabetic retinopathy

Peripheral vision

This is the vision to the sides of your central vision. Peripheral vision is less clear than central vision, but we still see a lot through it. Damage to the optic nerve or vision areas in the brain can make you feel like you are seeing through a narrow tube.

Causes of peripheral vision loss include:

- › Glaucoma
- › Retinal detachment
- › Stroke

Contrast sensitivity

Contrast sensitivity is being able to notice small differences between light and dark. Low contrast sensitivity can affect your night vision and ability to read small letters.

Causes of low contrast sensitivity include:

- › Cataracts
- › Glaucoma
- › Diabetic retinopathy

How do I get used to vision loss?

1. Make the most of your remaining vision.

- Use the “Next Best Spot.”
 - › When your central vision is blocked by a blind spot, it can help to find the “Next Best Spot.” Try to get used to using your peripheral vision. This may be hard. Vision rehabilitation services can help you make the most of your remaining vision and keep you doing your daily activities.
- Make things brighter and bigger.
 - › Use more light (carry a small flashlight, use a reading lamp).
 - › Use large print (newspapers, calendars, books). Large print books are available at all public libraries.

2. Stay safe at home.

- Most accidents happen at home, even for those with no vision loss. It is important to follow safety practices at home, especially if you are just getting used to vision loss.
 - › Make sure all areas of your home are well-lit.
 - › Keep walkways free of clutter (including loose rugs, small furniture, and electrical cords).

- › Store things you use often in easy reach (for example, on lower shelves or on the counter). **Do not climb to reach things.**
- › Talk with your occupational therapist (OT) about safety equipment for your home (like stair handrails, raised toilet seats, shower grab bars).
- › Use assistive devices and safety equipment as told by your OT.
- › Keep your phone or cellphone in easy reach.
- › Review all of your medications with your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or pharmacist. Some drugs can make you feel drowsy, dizzy, or unsteady.
- › Consider wearing a medical/emergency alert system.
- › Exercise regularly to improve your muscle strength, balance, and coordination.

3. Try out supportive and adaptable technology.

- There are many resources for people with vision loss. These include computers, smartphones, apps, and other digital tools. Try out different tools to find out which ones work for you. They may help you stay independent.
- Contact the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Foundation (see page 7) or Vision Loss Rehabilitation™ Canada (see page 8) to make an appointment with an assistive technology specialist. They can help you set up accessible features and apps on your computer or smartphone.

Computer software

Most computers have accessibility add-ons for the display screen (like larger font and cursor sizes, higher contrast, magnifying functions).

Screen readers: This software reads the content on the screen out loud.

- Windows Narrator is built into the Windows operating system. It reads:
 - › Text on the screen
 - › Notifications
 - › Calendar appointments
 - › <https://support.microsoft.com/en-ca/help/17173/windows-10-hear-text-read-aloud>
- JAWS® (Job Access with Speech) translates text on the screen to speech and Braille for many computer applications.
 - › www.freedomscientific.com/products/software/jaws
- For more information on screen readers, visit the American Foundation® for the Blind:
 - › www.afb.org/blindness-and-low-vision/using-technology/assistive-technology-products/screen-readers

Speech recognition: This software changes the words you say out loud into text on the screen.

- Windows voice recognition lets you control your computer using your voice without a keyboard or mouse.
 - › <https://support.microsoft.com/en-ca/help/17208/windows-10-use-speech-recognition>
- Apple's Voice Control translates your spoken words into text.
 - › <https://support.apple.com/en-ca/HT202584>
- CDesk by AdaptiveVoice replaces your computer's desktop with one program that includes 15 applications.
 - › www.adaptivevoice.com/products/CDeskProducts.htm

Mobile devices: Mobile devices (like smartphones) include many accessibility settings. Staff at mobile device stores can help you set up your phone to be more accessible.

- Apple accessibility
 - › www.apple.com/ca/accessibility/iphone/vision
- Android accessibility
 - › <https://support.google.com/accessibility/android/answer/6006564>

Siri (Apple): This lets you use voice commands to make phone calls, send messages, set alarms and reminders, get directions, play music, and more.

VoiceOver (Apple): This is a gesture-based screen reader that turns spoken words into text, recognizes images, and can describe videos.

Zoom (Apple): This built-in screen magnifier lets you make part or all of the screen look bigger.

Magnifier (Apple/Android): Use your phone's camera as a digital magnifying glass.

Font size adjustment (Apple/Android): Make the font size on your screen bigger.

What are your questions? Please ask.

We are here to help you.

**In Nova Scotia you can call 811 to talk
with a registered nurse about your
health care questions 24/7.**

Apps

BlindSquare (Apple): This GPS (navigation) app helps you get around indoors and outdoors. It gives helpful information and descriptions of the environment to let you travel with confidence and safety.

› www.blindsquare.com

Be My Eyes (Apple/Android): Users can connect to a live video call for on-demand visual help from volunteers around the world.

› www.bemyeyes.com

Aira (Apple/Android): Users connect with trained agents through the app or through Horizon Smart Glasses. Agents can provide visual assistance, and arrange for rideshares.

› <https://aira.io>

Seeing AI (Apple): This app uses your phone's camera to recognize and describe text, product barcodes, people, paper money, colours, and more.

› www.microsoft.com/en-us/seeing-ai

Home and leisure

Smart speakers (Amazon Echo/Google Home): Wireless speakers with voice-control functions can be connected to other devices in your home. You can then use voice commands to do things like listen to music, check the weather, make phone calls, send texts, and more.

› www.amazon.com/Amazon-Echo-And-Alexa-Devices/b?ie=UTF8&node=9818047011

› https://store.google.com/ca/product/google_home

CELA (Centre for Equitable Library Access) and NNELS (National Network for Equitable Library Service): As a member of any public library in Nova Scotia, you can borrow accessible books from CELA and NNELS. The collections are designed for people with print disabilities, and include English and French materials. Items are available in audio, e-text, braille, and printbraille picture books (picture books that have both printed words and braille). Ask at your local library branch.

DAISY (the Digital Accessible Information System): DAISY offers people who are blind or who have a reading disability more options to navigate through text than an audiobook. It also gives descriptions of images to provide a better reading experience. Ask your local library branch for more information.

4. Keep up your social supports.

Many recreation and leisure activities can be adapted for people with vision impairment or for people who are losing their vision. It is very important to stay active for your physical health and mental well-being. This may mean returning to an activity you enjoy or trying something new. Staying at home to avoid asking for help is not independence. This can lead to isolation and loneliness.

Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) Foundation programs and services

CNIB offers programs for people with vision loss in 5 areas:

- Daily living skills
- Active and social lifestyle
- Career
- Education and literacy
- Technology

› <https://cnib.ca/en/programs-and-services?region=ns>

Adjustment to Sight Loss support group: is an 8-week support group led by a counsellor over the phone. You may find sharing your stories, feelings, and personal advice helps you to cope with the physical and emotional effects of vision loss. To access this program, please contact CNIB:

- › Phone (toll-free): 1-800-563-2642

Vision Loss Rehabilitation™ Canada: offers training to help people who are blind or partially-sighted stay safe and keep their independence.

- › <https://ns.visionlossrehab.ca/en>

Blind Sports Nova Scotia: provides recreational and competitive sports opportunities for people of any age and skill level who are blind or visually impaired.

- › www.blindsportsnovascotia.ca

PatientsLikeMe®: is an online community to connect people with similar experiences. You can ask practical questions about your condition, learn how others cope and manage their health, and share your personal experience.

- › www.patientslikeme.com

Vision loss also affects your loved ones

If a loved one is going through vision loss, try to offer comfort and support. It can be hard to know what to say or do. Keeping your loved one's independence and dignity in mind can help.

To help your relationship with someone who is visually impaired, start by sympathizing with their experience. Ask what you can do to support them.

- To learn practical tips on guiding someone with vision loss and blindness etiquette, visit:
 - › <https://cnib.ca/en/sight-loss-info/when-someone-you-know-blind?region=ns>
- A Guide to Vision Loss for Family and Friends:
 - › <https://aphconnectcenter.org/visionaware/families/>

Resources

Coping with vision loss

- VisionAware
 - › <https://aphconnectcenter.org/visionaware/living-with-blindness-or-low-vision/adjusting-to-blindness-low-vision/>
- CNIB Foundation
 - › <https://cnib.ca/en/sight-loss-info?region=ns>

Adjusting to vision loss

- Safety in the Home (VisionAware)
 - › <https://aphconnectcenter.org/visionaware/living-with-blindness-or-low-vision/redesigning-your-home-room-by-room/>
- Staying Safe in Your Community (VisionAware)
 - › <https://aphconnectcenter.org/visionaware/living-with-blindness-or-low-vision/choosing-where-to-live/staying-safe-in-your-community-3251/>
- American Foundation® for the Blind
 - › www.afb.org/blindness-and-low-vision
- Lifeline Canada (medical alert system)
 - › www.lifeline.ca/en

Making the most of your remaining vision

- American Academy of Ophthalmology® (AAO)
 - › www.aao.org/eye-health/diseases/low-vision-aids-rehabilitation
- VisionAware
 - › <https://aphconnectcenter.org/visionaware/living-with-blindness-or-low-vision/daily-living-skills/>

Notes:

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here:
<https://library.nshealth.ca/Patients-Guides>

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: <https://811.novascotia.ca>

*Adapted with permission from: SMARTSIGHT™ - Patient Handout,
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