

# LIVING WELL WITH VISION LOSS



## Adjusting to life with vision loss

Living with vision loss can be challenging. It can impact your quality of life and your independence. No one's experience is the same. The impact of your vision loss will depend upon your eye condition, how much of your vision remains, and how you respond personally.

You may experience a range of emotions such as disbelief, anxiety, depression or even grief. At this stage, it's important to pause, and give yourself time to calmly consider the pathway that will lead to the best outcomes. Try to avoid making quick decisions about your employment, activities, future plans, or lifestyle.

With the right support, it is possible to live well and remain independent. Seek advice from your eye health

professional and low vision services. Reach out to your social and recreational networks, particularly if you are recently diagnosed.

## It's important to have someone to talk to

If you begin to feel withdrawn, anxious, or depressed, it's important to seek help.

Practical ways to stay in control include:

- Talking with friends and family about your diagnosis
- Staying physically and socially active
- Learning new skills and adapting familiar ones to new circumstances
- Explaining to others how they can support you
- Maintaining existing social activities and exploring new options for friendship and enjoyment



# Tips for living with vision loss

Strategies to make things **BIGGER, BOLDER and BRIGHTER** can make everyday tasks easier and safer. Here are simple ways to adapt your environment:

## Make things BRIGHTER

- **Improve lighting:** Move lamps closer to what you're doing to boost brightness for reading, using appliances or preparing food.
- **Extra lighting on stairs,** in bathrooms, kitchens, cupboards and in dark passages or use a torch (such as on your phone) when needed.

## Make Things BOLDER

- **Increase contrast:** Use white cups for dark drinks, place dark placemats under white plates, and alternate chopping boards depending on food colour
- **Use bold pens:** A dark felt-tip pen is easier to see than a ballpoint pen
- **Label clearly:** Add bright, contrasting labels or tactile markers such as raised or Velcro stickers, on dials, remotes and appliances
- **Convert to electronic:** read the newspaper online, take a photograph, use a smart device application to read for you

## Make Things BIGGER

- Photograph and use built in electronic zoom to enlarge recipes, phone numbers, addresses, sheet music and menus using the camera or magnifier setting on your phone
- Carry a small handheld magnifier when shopping and out and about

## Control Glare

- Wear sunglasses and a hat or visor outdoors
- Reduce reflections by covering shiny surfaces
- Position yourself so that light comes from behind or the side, not directly in front

These simple adjustments can help make daily activities safer, more comfortable and more enjoyable.





## Mental health and wellbeing

Living with vision loss or being diagnosed with an eye condition that threatens your vision, can be difficult to accept, as vision loss can result in reduced independence and quality of life.

There are some simple strategies that may help as you adjust, such as:

- Staying positive and setting realistic goals
- Focusing on what you can do
- Accepting limitations without being overly hard on yourself
- Actively seeking support from others
- Adopting a flexible, "can-do" approach to new challenges

It is normal to feel overwhelmed, and at times this can make it difficult to absorb or remember information from your eye health professional. Gaining a clear understanding of your condition is an important step toward managing it effectively and maintaining your independence.

When visiting your eye health professional, it can help to:

- take notes or ask for instructions to be written down
- bring a friend or family member for support and discussion later
- Request printed or additional information if available
- Ask questions and seek clarification when needed
- Contact Macular Disease Foundation Australia for further information or suggested questions to ask
- Keep a file of your history, reports and medication

**"I was diagnosed with macular degeneration at 39 years of age. I sought professional help and looked at what I could do, not what I couldn't do. I believe a 'can do' attitude will improve your quality of life."**

**- Barry**



## Understanding depression

Research shows people with vision loss are three times more likely to experience depressive symptoms compared with those without vision loss<sup>i</sup>.

Depression is more than a low mood or feeling sad. It is ongoing and affects how you feel, think, and function, often lasting weeks or longer.

You may be experiencing depression if, for more than two weeks, you:

- Feel sad, down, or miserable most of the time
- Lose interest or enjoyment in activities you usually like

You may also experience symptoms such as:

- Withdrawing from family and friends
- Feeling overwhelmed, guilty, irritable, frustrated, or lacking confidence
- Negative thoughts about yourself or the future
- Constant tiredness, sleep problems, headaches, muscle pain, or changes in appetite or weight

Depression can affect daily life, relationships, and physical health. Importantly, **depression is treatable**, and early support can make a significant difference. Discuss these feelings with your health practitioner.

<sup>i</sup> Dillon L, Tang D, Liew G, Hackett M, Craig A, Gopinath B, et al. Facilitators and barriers to participation in mental well-being programs by older Australians with vision impairment: community and stakeholder perspectives. *Eye (London)*. 2020;34(7):1287-95.

## Understanding anxiety

Some worry after vision loss is normal. However, anxiety becomes a concern when it is ongoing, difficult to control, and interferes with daily life.

Symptoms of anxiety may include:

- Feeling worried or on edge most of the time
- Difficulty relaxing or calming your thoughts
- Fatigue, difficulty concentrating, muscle tension, or sleep problems

If anxiety is affecting your quality of life, professional support can help.

## Seeking help

If you think you might be experiencing depression or anxiety:

### Speak to your GP or health professional

Your GP can assess your mental health, discuss treatment options, and refer you to appropriate support. This may include a mental

health treatment plan, which can provide access to subsidised sessions with a mental health professional, and in some cases medication.

### Talk to someone you trust

Sharing your concerns with a family member, friend, or carer can reduce feelings of isolation and help you feel supported.

### Additional support

Macular Disease Foundation Australia and other organisations offer peer support programs and support groups. Talking with others who have a macular disease diagnosis can be reassuring and empowering, whether or not vision changes are present.

**To learn more about peer support programs, call the MDFA National Helpline on 1800 111 709.**

#### Helpful contacts:

- **MDFA Helpline:**  
1800 111 709  
(Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm)
- **Beyond Blue:** 1300 22 4636  
(24/7)
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14  
(24/7)





## Join Eye Connect today

Living with vision loss is not easy and there may be challenges ahead.

Macular Disease Foundation Australia's Eye Connect support service is free of charge, independent and endorsed by Australia's leading eye health professionals.

It offers tailored support and information that people living with age-related macular degeneration and diabetes-related eye conditions can access in between appointments with their eyecare professional.

Whether you prefer to receive assistance and resources online, in the post, or over the phone, Eye Connect has you covered.

Join Eye Connect via [www.mdfoundation.com.au/join-eye-connect](http://www.mdfoundation.com.au/join-eye-connect) or call us on **1800 111 709**.

## Need more information?

Learn more about macular disease at [www.mdfoundation.com.au](http://www.mdfoundation.com.au)

You can also order information kits and Amsler grids by calling our National Helpline on **1800 111 709**.

We have a free newsletter and you can sign up to receive invitations to education sessions and events in your area.

Contact us today.

**T** 1800 111 709 (free call)

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**W**[www.mdfoundation.com.au](http://www.mdfoundation.com.au)

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