

# A guide to living with low vision





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Vision Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the First Australians and Traditional Owners of the Land across our working area. We pay our respects to Elders both past and present. We are committed to ensuring an inclusive culture, and value diversity and all abilities.

# Vision Australia, your partners in support

Vision loss can be life-changing and you may be wondering, “What’s next?”

You may be unsure how to keep on doing the things you love, or how your family and friends will react to your news.

Vision Australia works with Australians of all ages who are blind or have low vision across the country. We provide the support and guidance you need to develop new strategies to feel confident about your future.



# What is low vision?

**Low vision** is used to describe someone who still has some functional vision but may need to be twice as close to an object as someone with unaffected vision to see it.

**Blindness** is when someone has very little or no sight and needs to rely almost completely on other senses like touch and hearing to understand and navigate their environments safely.

People often assume that living with vision loss means living in total darkness, however the experience can be broad with varying degrees of remaining vision.

At its simplest, low vision means that a person still has some useful sight, but they have gotten to the point where glasses are no longer enough.

What many don't know is that much like after having an injury, there is a whole world of rehabilitation and support services that exist to treat and manage low vision.



**Vision Australia estimates there are 575,000 people in Australia who are blind or have low vision. This is expected to increase by 25% by 2030.**



# The different types of low vision

## Central vision loss

Not being able to see things in the centre of your vision.



## Peripheral vision loss

Not being able to see things out of the corners of your eyes.



## Night blindness

Difficulty adjusting to low light.



## Distorted vision

Blurry, hazy or foggy vision.



# Spotting the signs of low vision

Low vision is something that often happens gradually, which means the early signs can go unnoticed.

Eye fatigue is one of the earliest signs, but you might also notice you are falling or bumping into things more often.

**There are a few signs you should look for:**

- blurry, wavy or cloudy vision
- seeing halos around lights
- sensitivity to light and glare
- difficulty seeing clearly at night
- decreased peripheral (side) vision
- changes in colours
- difficulty reading
- difficulty recognising faces
- difficulty making sense of what you see
- increased clumsiness and bumping into things.

When these symptoms appear, it's important to head to your eye specialist. A trip to your GP or optometrist is a great place to start, and they can refer you to other relevant healthcare professionals.





# Why knowing the signs is important

Taking care of your eyes is often an afterthought for most people, but there are some easy steps you can take to protect your vision.

If you notice your eyesight is being impacted by vision loss early, you may be able to prevent significant loss and prepare yourself to adapt to further changes to your vision.

**These simple tips will help you take a step in the right direction:**

- Have regular eye check-ups and follow the advice from eye specialists.
- Wearing sunglasses and hats when going outside.
- Take regular breaks when you are using digital devices to rest your eyes.
- Eat foods that are high in antioxidants and other essential vitamins, such as green leafy vegetables, eggs, fish, nuts and fruits.
- Avoid smoking or vaping.

## This can help you...

**Stay up to date.** Regular check-ups on your eye health and vision can help you to catch progression early and seek support.

**Prevent damage.** Exposure to the sun and UV light is known to contribute to eye diseases including cataracts and age-related macular degeneration.

**Maintain eye health.** A balanced diet can help prevent or slow down the progression of vision loss.



90% of vision loss can be prevented or treated when detected early.

# Adapting doesn't need to be complicated

The earlier you are introduced to strategies and solutions to help with your daily activities, the easier they are to learn and remember.

Making things **Bigger, Bolder and Brighter** is one of the simplest and most effective techniques.

## Bigger

When you make things bigger, it allows for easier viewing and may help to reduce eye strain and tiredness. Magnifiers can help with reading and writing tasks and are available in a wide range of sizes, strengths and models to suit your individual needs.

## Bolder

Making things bolder allows for items or words to be seen easily against their background. Something as simple as using navy text on a yellow background can increase the contrast levels on printed and online materials, making it a lot easier to read.

## Brighter

Stronger, brighter lighting makes what is in front of you easier to see. While everyone's eyes are different and some do not like making things brighter, it is important to experiment and find the right lighting conditions for you.

Making changes like these can be as straightforward as adjusting the lighting in your home, making font sizes bigger or using a screen reader to read the morning paper. The tools and technologies available are designed for you to continue to enjoy the things you love to do.

# Technology is a great tool for adapting



**Magnifiers** - Whether it is the newspaper or a webpage online, a magnifier will make the text you're viewing bigger and easier to read.



**Everyday technology** - From enlarging your screen text to filters that increase contrast, you can gain access to the world through a wide range of assistive technology.



**Lighting solutions** - Offering consistent lighting, powerful lenses and clever magnifications that enrich colour contrast.



**Clocks and watches** - From braille to audio options, being able to tell the time easily and confidently is a life skill you do not need to give up.



**Kitchen aids** - With the right tools, you can continue to cook safely and like a pro and build up your confidence in the kitchen.



**Labelling and identification** - Products like this make navigating your home much easier by allowing you to scan and listen to what an item is without needing to see it.



**Leisure and hobbies** - Enjoy your favourite activities like board games, sewing and tactile sports equipment, designed for people living with vision loss.



**Mobility aids** - Mobility aids can build your confidence when leaving your home, helping you get out and about and enjoy the world around you.

Always consider training to help you get the most out of your new technology. For more info or to find the closest Vision Store to you, visit us online at <https://shop.visionaustralia.org/>.

## What's next?

When you're ready, you can find out about the government benefits and many services that you can access.

As a leading national provider of blindness and low vision services, Vision Australia supports people of all ages who are blind or have low vision to help them live the life they choose.

We can help you find answers to questions you may have.

Contact us on 1300 84 74 66 or email [info@visionaustralia.org](mailto:info@visionaustralia.org).

## Find out about government benefits you might be eligible for

You might be entitled to government funding that will help you cover the costs of some services.

**These include:**

- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) for people under 65 years.
- My Aged Care for people over 65 years.
- Disability Support Pension.
- National Companion Card.
- Blind Age Pension for people over 65 years.

There are also some state and territory-based government subsidies to help cover the cost of public transport.



# Specialised vision loss and allied health services

Vision Australia gives you access to a team of specialists and experts, designed to help you navigate your way through your vision loss. It can be hard to remember who you need to contact and for what reason, which is why we have compiled the list below.

Optometrist	Primary eye health care providers who prescribe glasses and contact lenses. They also screen for, diagnose and manage eye disease and prescribe a range of therapeutic medications. They can refer clients directly to an ophthalmologist if more complex treatments are required.
Orthoptists	Allied eye health practitioners who specialise in the assessment, diagnosis and non-surgical management of vision and eye conditions.
Ophthalmologists	Eye doctors with additional specialist training in the diagnosis and management of eye conditions, who can also perform medical and surgical treatments and procedures.
Psychologists and counsellors	Working with you to develop the strategies and confidence you need to help you manage your changing mental and emotional health, also providing you with someone you can talk to about your vision loss.
Orientation and mobility experts	These experts will work with you to develop the skills you need to independently and safely navigate at home and in the community.
Access technology specialists	Assessing your current skill levels and areas that require some help, these specialists will train you to use technology like screen readers, magnifiers and voice-to-text tech.
Occupational therapists	Working with those living with blindness or low vision, occupational therapists are there to help you improve your independence to continue living your everyday life.

# Know Your Vision clinic

The Know Your Vision Clinic will be your first introduction to Vision Australia and the services we offer to best support you.

We've made this appointment longer than your usual optometry check-up so we can go a step further in a 2-hour, in-depth consultation. We will also provide you with expert assistance and advice when glasses are no longer enough.

## **What you can expect in your appointment:**

- Personalised care from our skilled eye experts so we can take the time to explain your eye condition with care.
- Expert advice and simple ways you can maximise your remaining vision to help you to continue to do the things you love.
- Advice on and access to our extensive range of low vision devices and optical aids priced to suit all budgets.
- Live demonstrations with assistive technology so you can walk out with a device that will immediately help make the everyday that little bit easier (Not available on telehealth consultations).
- Referral into the broader support services offered by Vision Australia to suit your individual needs and help you achieve your personal goals.

To learn more about the Know Your Vision Clinic, head to <https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/find-services/older-adults/know-your-vision-clinic/>.

# Check in and Chat program

Did you know up to 45% of people who are blind or have low vision experience feelings of isolation and depression?

Check in and Chat is a telehealth program designed to help build optimism and boost self-esteem while adjusting to the daily impact of vision loss.

The program consists of six, up to 45-minute telehealth sessions with one of Vision Australia's qualified team to discuss topics including:

- The emotional impact of vision loss.
- Learning new ways to adjust.
- Building support and maintaining social connection.
- How to talk to others about vision loss.
- Getting back to your meaningful activities.

We speak with many new and long-term clients who wish they had talked through how they were feeling earlier.

To learn more about Check in and Chat, head to [www.visionaustralia.org/check-in-and-chat/](http://www.visionaustralia.org/check-in-and-chat/).

“

**I didn't feel embarrassed, but I didn't think I needed support yet... but we all need it as soon as possible. Don't wait. I wish I'd have done this 10 years ago, and eased myself into the world that I am in now – which is really, really hard.”**

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Vision Australia client.



# Technology assessments

Our access technology specialists are trained to find the right technology to help you regain your independence and make every day easier.

## Together you will:

- Access your needs and goals.
- Look at any technology you currently have.
- Try a range of different options to identify what suits your needs.
- Provide training to use your device with confidence.

To find out more about our technology assessments, call us on 1300 84 74 66 and ask for the AT Helpdesk, or email at [ATCHelp@visionaustralia.org](mailto:ATCHelp@visionaustralia.org).



# Smart Home program

Smart home technology enables you to use your voice to give you quick and easy access to a limitless amount of knowledge and news, even helping you stay in touch by reading and replying to texts and emails using your voice.

**Vision Australia's Smart Home program is run online and includes:**

- Free installation of your device at home.
- Personalised education on how voice-enabled assistive technology can work in the home, including setting it up to lock your doors, turn off lights all through the power of voice.
- A safe space to ask questions.
- Share and receive tips and tricks with fellow peers.
- The option of one-on-one or small group session.
- Learn new ways the device can enhance your life and make daily tasks easier.

Register your interest by emailing [voiceassist@visionaustralia.org](mailto:voiceassist@visionaustralia.org) or calling 1300 84 74 66.



# Employment services

As a provider of Disability Employment Services (DES), we support people who are blind or have low vision feel supported in their starting or maintaining their careers.

**We help people gain and maintain employment by:**

- Connecting you with job opportunities that suit you.
- Providing guidance through applications and interviews.
- Helping you secure the best accessible technology to help in your day-to-day work.
- Supporting you through orientation and mobility on things like travel training, occupational therapy or assistive technology.



**I went and saw Vision Australia's Employment Services because I wasn't too sure what you could do with low vision, and I got enrolled in their computer classes. It was very positive to be around people who were already in the position I was in. I had never met or spoken to anybody who was vision impaired before. Knowing you're not alone, that there are others is very positive."**

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**Brittnee, business owner living with Diabetic Retinopathy**

# Other resources that can help you everyday

## Life hacks

Our life hacks series showcase some of the best tips and tricks our clients have discovered over the years for tackling everyday tasks. If you're looking for ways to keep cooking safely, or apply your makeup in a reliably chic way, this collection of videos is for you.

Visit us online today to see the full collection:

<https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/helpful-resources/individuals/life-hacks/>.

## Vision Australia Library

The Vision Australia Library opens up a new world of audio and braille books, newspapers, magazines and podcasts for people who are blind, have low vision or live with a print disability.

The library membership is free to join, because everybody should be able to continue to enjoy reading and stay up-to-date with world news.

To learn more about the services the library can offer, visit:

<https://www.visionaustralia.org/services/library/>.

## Vision Australia Radio

The Vision Australia Radio Network incorporates ten community radio stations across Victoria, southern New South Wales, Adelaide and Perth, as well as five digital radio services.

They offer a range of interesting and informative programs that feature readings from the latest newspapers, magazines and books to stay connected to your local community.

To learn more about Vision Australia Radio, visit here:  
<https://radio.visionaustralia.org/>.



# Vision loss can be an emotional journey

When dealing with a vision loss diagnosis, it's normal for you to experience a wide range of emotions.

Dealing with the challenges that blindness and low vision can present is different for everyone. For some that may mean impacts on their mental health and overall wellbeing.

With the right support, you can begin to take steps to achieve your goals, learn how to ask for help and understand how taking time each day for a small activity that brings you joy is important to begin this journey of acceptance.

If you or someone you know needs to talk to someone at any time, we encourage you to seek support and call:

**Vision Australia:** 1300 84 74 66

[Lifeline:](#) 13 11 14

[beyondblue:](#) 1300 22 4636

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**Be patient with yourself and don't set your expectations too high. You have to learn a truck load of stuff...Be kind to yourself and give yourself time.”**

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Paul, Proposal engineer living with Retinal Detachment and Glaucoma



Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Go to [www.dss.gov.au](http://www.dss.gov.au) for more information.

## Contact us

Find out more about how our services and support can help you and your family today.

**Call us on 1300 84 74 66**

Vision Australia has metro and regional centres around Australia. Call us or visit our website at [visionaustralia.org](http://visionaustralia.org) to find out the one closest to you.



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Australia**

Blindness. Low Vision. Opportunity.