

Low Vision Rehabilitation...

Accommodating and compensating for vision loss.

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Macular Degeneration is a potentially devastating, progressive eye disease that deprives many individuals of their ability to perform even routine activities. The primary culprit is the loss of central vision, which provides us visual clarity and detail. Virtually all activities are impeded, including reading, writing, driving, watching television, and general mobility. As the disease progresses, it often leaves its victims feeling hopeless. "My eye doctor tells me there is nothing that will bring my vision back," many confess. "I will just have to learn to live with it." Though this may be true to some degree, it is important that those diagnosed with Macular Degeneration learn there are options available through compensation strategies such as visual aids, training, and professional assistance. In this regard, an Occupational Therapist specializing in Low Vision can help.

Low Vision Rehabilitation is focused on assisting individuals regaining personal independence. An Occupational Therapist, with a clear understanding of the diagnosis and the residual deficits, can provide valuable assistance in the evaluation and selection of optical and non-optical devices best suited for their specific needs at home, work, or social environments.

As an example...Miriam loved to watch birds out of her kitchen window and read letters from her family and friends. With unbearable glare sensitivity as a result of Macular Degeneration, she was forced to lower the shades, and turn out the lights. The Occupational Therapist was able to help by equipping her with indoor sunglasses that surround her eyes, and a low-glare light behind her easy chair. She was soon at her window watching the Cardinals and musing over her grandkids' written antics.

When Miles reached for a Tylenol from his bathroom cupboard, he hoped he wasn't swallowing a laxative instead. His therapist allayed his fears, advising him to keep a gooseneck lamp nearby, and to re-label his medicine bottles with a bold, black marker. "I now know for sure what I'm taking", he exclaimed.

Reading the newspaper was a thing of the past for Bill. He relished, instead, watching golf and catching up on the news through his television, but his vision loss made this task increasingly more difficult. With his favorite chair across the room, the best he could do was try to listen, but his hearing, too, was diminished. Now using inexpensive binoculars "TV Viewers", suggested by the Occupational Therapist, he says, "I can see the TV better. I was able to watch the Olympics".

Mary, who is “legally blind”, is able to read small print magazines with her powerful closed circuit television, a device that will magnify up to fifty times. She complained, however, that trying to follow recipes with this device is nearly impossible. “By the time I get to the kitchen from my ‘reading machine’, I’ve forgotten the measurements.” With training on using her peripheral vision, and a 12x lighted magnifier, she is now able to continue her baking with minimal difficulty.

“I’ve noticed that background colors make a big difference,” Frances observed. Because Macular Degeneration impeded her ability to discern subtle contrasts in color, she could not make out the gray numbers on her white stove dials, nor see the difference between her shower threshold and the white tile of her bathroom floor. The Occupational Therapist helped by labeling important stove settings with florescent paint, and marking the shower entry with bright red tape.

Although Macular Degeneration deprives individuals of central vision it does not have to take away independence and one’s quality of life. An Occupational Therapist specializing in low vision can help persons adapt and function more successfully. The Occupational Therapist’s tools are many including magnifiers, binocular devices, talking watches, bold numbered telephones, talking glucometers, and beeping liquid level indicators. Some of the vision enhancing techniques used include compensating by using other areas of the eye, and simple adaptations such as glare reduction, magnification, and improved lighting. These interventions also benefit those who experience low vision due to other causes such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and strokes.

Professional Therapy Services, Inc. offers Low Vision Rehabilitation through its network of outpatient clinics located throughout Central Illinois. For more information, contact Professional Therapy Services at (309)674-7874.