

Helping a loved one with vision changes

A brain injury, stroke or brain tumor can cause changes in a person's vision. This can affect his or her ability to do daily activities such as brushing teeth, bathing, doing the finances, reading, preparing meals and getting around. The risk of falling may also increase if the person has problems seeing and finding objects.

This handout gives you suggestions on how to help your loved one manage vision changes and do their daily activities safely.

What kinds of vision changes are common?

Loss of visual field

The visual field is the total area in which objects can be seen while you are looking straight ahead.

There are many different kinds of visual field losses that can happen. Individuals with visual field loss experience "perceptual completion" where the brain takes the partial visual information and completes the picture. So even though the individual doesn't see the entire picture, the brain "tricks" them into thinking they actually do.

If your loved one has homonymous hemianopsia, he or she could think they are seeing everything in the visual field. However, they are seeing this:



They could miss seeing things such as items in a hallway, people or doorways but be completely unaware of it. This can lead to safety concerns.

Visual inattention or neglect

Some people may experience an inattention to one side, more often the left side than right side. Individuals may not scan the environment appropriately and therefore are not able to see all the information needed to make an informed decision. In its severest form it is called neglect.

What can be done to help your loved one see better?

Scanning

Scanning the environment can help your loved one become familiar with his or her surroundings.

Ways to help your loved one scan the environment:

- Remind him or her that they cannot always see their full environment. Encourage them to turn their head all the way from left to right to see both sides of their environment. Be like a lighthouse!
- Remind them to scan each new area they enter.
- Encourage them to place their arms out in front so that they can feel for objects.



Activities to help your loved one practice scanning:

- Reading large font text.
- Doing crosswords or word searches.
- Copying an address book.
- Looking up phone numbers in a phone book.

What you may see	How you can help
<p>Runs into objects when walking and/or loses balance or falls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce clutter. • Move furniture and objects to create a clear path. • Remove rugs or use double-sided tape so rugs do not slip. • Place bright coloured tape on doorway entrances and on each step. • Make sure that all staircases have handrails. • Add grab bars inside the bathtub and next to the toilet. • Use non-slip rubber mats in the bathtub. • Encourage your loved one to scan the environment as outlined on page 3.
<p>Has a hard time reading or writing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cannot see where the pen touched the line • cannot see the line • cannot find words or read whole sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use items with large text such as large button telephones, clocks with large numbers, large print books. • Increase lighting. • Place a red line down the right and left side of the page to show where the page begins and ends. • Use a ruler under each line to emphasize the line. • Cover extra information with another piece of paper to reduce clutter. • Practice tracing a line with a pen. • Encourage your loved one to scan the environment as outlined on page 3.

What you may see	How you can help
<p>Has a hard time finding items such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• toothbrush• food or dishes <p>May also have a hard time telling the difference between objects having the same colour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Return items to the same spot after using them so your loved one is familiar with where to find common items.• Remove patterned backgrounds so that objects are more visible.• Place most used objects in easy to reach and common places.
<p>Has a hard time recognizing objects, shapes and sizes.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage him or her to use their hands to feel objects to help recognize what they are.• Use bright colours to make items stand out. For example, use bright coloured tape on the handle of a hairbrush.• Use dark and light colours together to make edges stand out. For example, use a white mug for black coffee, use light coloured plates that have dark borders to separate the plate from the placemat.

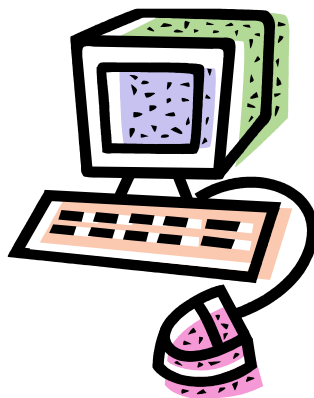
Making changes to the computer

There are a number of programs that can help you and your loved one change computer settings to make the information easier to see and use.

These programs can:

- increase the size of the text
- turn text into speech to hear it through the speakers
- allow you to use voice commands to access computer applications
- create an on-screen keyboard to help with typing

Different operating systems use different accessibility programs. To find out more about the programs on your computer, refer to your computer manual.



Driving

It is very important for your loved one's own safety and the safety of others to drive only when doctor says it is all right to do so.

Other resources

- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (<http://www.cnib.ca/>)
- Lighthouse International (<http://www.lighthouse.org/>)
- Make regular appointments with your family doctor, optometrist or ophthalmologist for check-ups.

Write down additional concerns you may have in order to discuss these with your health care provider:
