



# Getting Started **2020**

A Guide for People New to Vision Loss



# Welcome to Getting Started

Hello.

Welcome to Getting Started: For People New to Vision Loss. If you have been recently diagnosed with a visual impairment, you are about to begin a journey for which you may not be prepared and for which you may have many questions. The information within this booklet can help you navigate your journey. It will not provide you with the answers to all of your questions, but it will point you in the direction of finding the tools, information, support systems, and guidance you seek during this new and challenging time.

Getting Started is a resource updated with new information year over year. Though it is filled with evergreen tips and techniques, APH recognizes that we live in an ever-changing world. In a post-COVID-19 reality, we understand that people who are new to vision loss may rely more heavily on virtual support systems. It is our plan to continue to provide Getting Started in many formats, including print, web, social media, apps, a toll-free hotline, and more. It is our hope that in doing so, we may guide you toward the knowledge you seek.

With the support of family and friends, and the appropriate healthcare professionals, we know that you will bring your own faith and courage to your personal journey. You are not alone in this challenge. More than 25 million Americans report trouble seeing, and we want you to know that we are here to help. More than this, we want to hear from you. We welcome your feedback and suggestions. Reach out to us via the APH Information & Referral Line (800.232.5463) or at [connectcenter@aph.org](mailto:connectcenter@aph.org).

The American Printing House for the Blind is honored to partner with the Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation to share the 2020 edition of Getting Started with you. We hope you will learn valuable information and gain the knowledge you need to get started on your journey.

*Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation*

*The American Printing House for the Blind*



# Finding Help: A Roadmap

Macular Degeneration. Diabetic Retinopathy. Glaucoma. Cataracts. You may have heard of these eye conditions and believed that the individuals who were diagnosed with them were destined to a life of inactivity. No more cooking or sewing, fishing or exercising, or engaging socially with friends. But that couldn't be farther from the truth.

Like the millions of Americans who receive news that they are losing their vision each year, it is important to know you are not alone. Armed with the knowledge and support systems available to you, you can learn the skills and techniques you need to continue to do the things you enjoy. You can also receive the support you need to live at your maximum independence with your eye condition. There are several steps you can take to get moving on your journey.

Perhaps you're experiencing some vision problems and you've not yet visited an eye care professional to receive a diagnosis. Let's start there.



## Step 1: Make an Appointment for an Exam with Your Eye Care Professional

An **ophthalmologist** is a physician who diagnoses and treats eye diseases, prescribes medications, and performs eye surgery. If you are noticing a significant loss of vision, it is imperative that you make that first visit and talk to your eye care professional about the issues you are experiencing.

Here are some questions you or a family member may want to ask your ophthalmologist:

- What is the cause of my vision loss?
- Is my condition stable, or can I lose more sight?
- Do I qualify as legally blind?
- What new symptoms should I watch out for?
- Are there treatments for my eye condition?
- Is it still safe for me to drive?
- Am I entitled to any special services or benefits?
- What medical and rehabilitation resources are available?
- Are there any specialists I may need to see?



## **Step 2: Have a Low Vision Examination**

A comprehensive low vision examination is not rushed and is very thorough, often taking two to three times longer than a regular eye examination. This exam will explore how your eye condition affects your day-to-day living, how you may be adapting emotionally to your vision loss, and what types of support systems you already have in place.

The exam is performed by a Low Vision Specialist, who is an ophthalmologist or optometrist with additional credentials or specialization in low vision testing, diagnosis, and treatment. Specialists are trained to conduct low vision examinations and prescribe special low vision optical devices. It is important to have a comprehensive low vision eye exam performed by a professional who specializes in low vision.

APH recommends the following resources for more information about low vision services:

- Johns Hopkins Medicine-Wilmer Eye Institute: [www.hopkinsmedicine.org/wilmer](http://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/wilmer)
- OIB-TAC: [www.oib-tac.org](http://www.oib-tac.org)
- APH VisionAware Directory of Services: [www.visionaware.org/directory](http://www.visionaware.org/directory)
- The American Optometric Association: [www.aoa.org/](http://www.aoa.org/)
- American Academy of Ophthalmology: [www.aao.org/](http://www.aao.org/)
- Veterans Administration: [www.ocala.com/news/20190114/vas-vist-program-aids-veterans-with-poor-vision](http://www.ocala.com/news/20190114/vas-vist-program-aids-veterans-with-poor-vision)
- Foundation Fighting Blindness: [www.fightingblindness.org/visionwalk](http://www.fightingblindness.org/visionwalk)

**TOP TIP:** Talk to your eye care professional. Your ophthalmologist may have been the first professional to alert you to your low vision diagnosis – ask him or her to guide you to vision rehabilitation services in your area.



## Step 3: Explore Vision Rehabilitation Services

Vision rehabilitation services provide specialized training in many areas that are important for everyday independent living, from home safety and personal self-care to using technology and traveling independently. Vision rehabilitation services are provided by a specialized group of professionals including:

- **Low Vision Therapists** – Teach how to use vision efficiently with optical devices, non-optical devices, access technology, and special lighting.
- **Orientation and Mobility Specialists** – Teach the skills and concepts adults with vision loss need to travel independently and safely in the home and in the community.

- **Vision Rehabilitation Therapists** – Teach independent everyday living skills, including cooking, reading, writing, braille, personal self-care, and leisure activities.
- **Access Technology Specialists** – Teach the use of access technology to obtain printed and electronic information; maintain personal, business, and health records; and use navigation devices.

**TOP TIP:** Access technology (also known as assistive technology) helps individuals with vision loss to use different types of devices and equipment. For example, if you are having difficulty seeing the text on a computer screen, you might utilize text-to-speech output. This modification “assists” or gives you “access” to technology.



## Step 4: Get Connected

It is important to remember that others are experiencing the many challenges that you are going through, and that there are resources available to you. Do your best to connect – to resources, to services, to peers, and to activities. Your immediate community and your virtual community can bring you comfort, knowledge, and support. Do not be afraid to reach out to others – you may make a friend or two in the effort. APH recommends the following resources to help you connect:

- APH ConnectCenter’s VisionAware: [www.visionaware.org](http://www.visionaware.org)
- The APH Information & Referral Hotline: 800.232.5463 or [connectcenter@aph.org](mailto:connectcenter@aph.org)
- American Association of Retired Persons: [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)
- AFB AccessWorld® (access technology information): [www.afb.org/aw](http://www.afb.org/aw)
- National Federation of the Blind: [www.nfb.org/](http://www.nfb.org/)
- American Council of the Blind: [www.acb.org/](http://www.acb.org/)

**TOP TIP:** There are resources and support systems to help you. Reach out to others for help via telephone, websites, smartphone apps, social media, and peer support groups.



# Home is Where the Heart Is: Modifications and Safety

Like many older adults, you may spend much of your time at home. Here are some helpful hints that can make each area in your home safer and easier to navigate.

## **Lights! Glare! Action!**

- Reduce glare by using adjustable window coverings, such as blinds or shades.
- Arrange your furniture to reduce glare on televisions and computer monitors.
- Use adjustable flex-arm and gooseneck lamps for activities that need brighter, concentrated light.
- Dimmer switches can be helpful, as your lighting needs will change from morning to evening.
- Use switch plates in solid, bright colors or outline them with contrasting tape to make them easier to see. You can also use glow-in-the-dark switches at night.
- Replace darker lampshades with lighter colors that allow the maximum amount of light to shine through.

## **PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT:**

### **Color Star**

ColorStar® is a powerful hand-held color identifier with hundreds of uses at home, work, or school. It recognizes more than 1,000 different color shades, identifies contrast measurements, recognizes the color of LED lights, perceives the light intensity in the surrounding environment, and recognizes patterns – all with clear spoken voice output. To learn more about ColorStar, please visit [aph.org](http://aph.org).





## **Stairways, and Hallways, and Steps – Oh My!**

- Make sure all stairs are well lit, especially the top and bottom landings.
- Keep a flashlight in a convenient location at the top and bottom of the stairs.
- Mark the leading edge of the first and last steps with bright paint or light-reflecting tape that contrasts with the step. If you use tape, be sure to change it frequently and keep it in good repair.
- Use non-patterned, brightly colored runners to mark walking areas. Be sure to keep runners in good repair, since loose carpet or frayed edges can cause you to trip or fall.
- Keep your hallways clear of clutter, electrical cords, toys, and other tripping hazards.

- Paint handrails in a bright color that contrasts with the walls and flooring.
- Always hold the handrail as you walk up or down the stairs. You can put a tactile mark on the handrail at the top and bottom of the staircase to remind you that you are near the first or last step.

**TOP TIP:** Pay special attention to steps and stairs, the bathroom, and the area next to your bed. These are the most common places for falls in the home. Make sure these areas are well lit. With stairs, you may want to add anti-slip, color-contrasting treads.



## Catching Some Zzz's in the Bedroom

- Keep remote controls, reading glasses, and medications in a small tray at your bedside or a bed caddy that attaches to your mattress.
- Remove area rugs whenever possible. They can be a tripping hazard in the bedroom.
- Use zipper-type plastic bags, ice cube trays, or egg cartons to separate and store jewelry and other small items.
- Stop at the doorway to give your eyes enough time to adjust to any change in lighting level.
- Get a bedside lamp that you can turn on by clapping your hands or touching the base.
- Keep a flashlight next to the bed to use in the middle of the night.
- Always put your shoes and slippers away in your closet or under your bed as soon as you remove them.
- Keep a nightlight on throughout the night. Keep one in your bedroom, one in your bathroom, and one in the hallway.



## What's Cooking in the Kitchen?

- Attach lights to the underside of your kitchen cabinets. Make sure they are below eye level and don't shine or reflect into your eyes.
- Replace cabinet hardware with pulls or knobs that contrast with the cabinet.
- Mark your stove dials, microwave, and dishwasher with dots of glue, pieces of sticky-back Velcro<sup>®</sup>, or specialized products such as Hi-Marks 3-D Marker<sup>®</sup>, Bump Dots<sup>®</sup>, or Spot 'n Line Pen<sup>®</sup>.
- For safer slicing, use cutting boards in colors that contrast with your food. For example, keep a white board for slicing tomatoes and a dark board for slicing onions or bread.
- Pour liquids and measure ingredients over a tray or the sink to contain any spills and make cleanup easier.
- When you pour cold liquids, hook the tip of your index finger over the rim of the glass. Pour slowly and stop when you feel the liquid touch your finger.

- Use elbow-length oven mitts when placing/removing items from the oven.
- Use a large print timer with large raised, high-contrast numbers, such as white numbers on a black background or vice-versa.

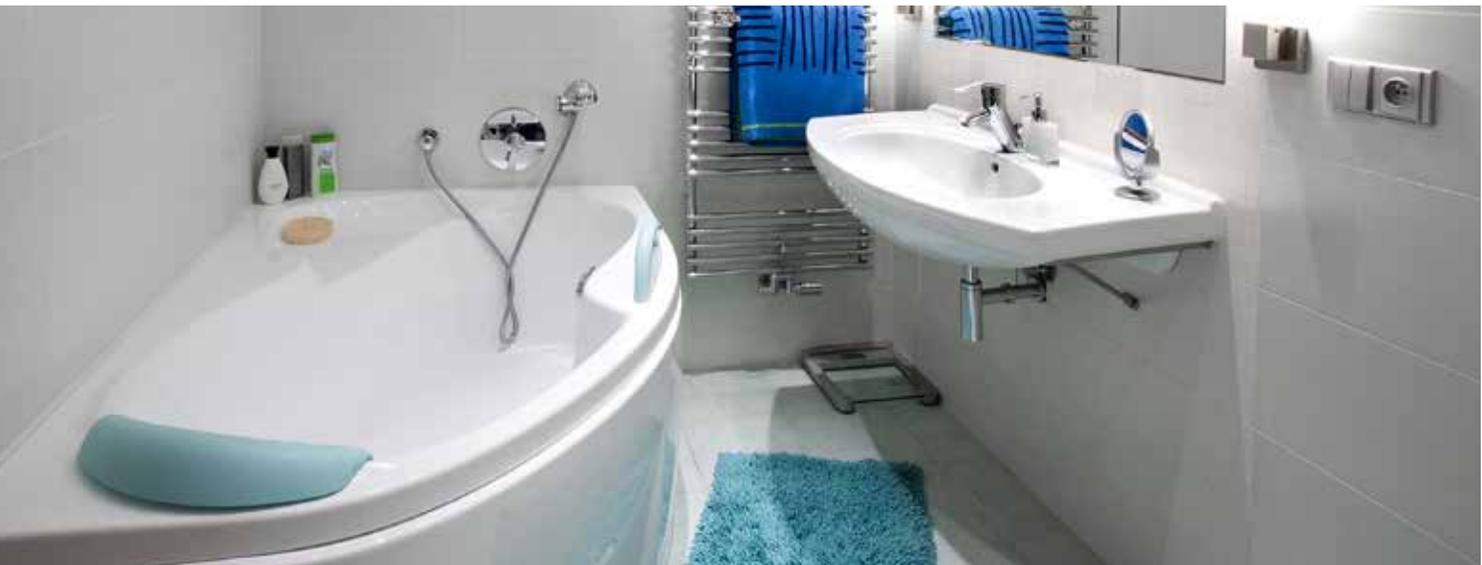
### **PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT:**

#### Talking Cooking Thermometer

Use this large-display talking thermometer for cooking, hobbies, gardening, and much more! Use the built-in eyelet at the top to hang the thermometer within easy reach.

For more information on the Talking Cooking Thermometer, please visit [aph.org](http://aph.org).





## A Brightly Colored Bathroom

- Use solid colored towels, washcloths, and bath mats that contrast with the bathtub, floor, and wall tile.
- Use non-skid floor mats in a color that contrasts with the walls and fixtures.
- Install grab bars by the toilet and in the shower and tub area. Wrap them with brightly colored textured tape that contrasts with the wall and tub. This can make the grab bars easier to see in case you need to reach for them quickly.
- Drape a contrasting bath mat over the edge of the tub to make it easier to see.
- Use a non-skid textured mat in a contrasting color in the shower or tub. It can prevent you from falling and give you a cue for judging the depth of the bathtub when you step into it.
- Set your hot water heater to a medium-range temperature to reduce the risk of burning yourself. Turn on the cold water first, and then add the hot. When you turn the water off, turn off the hot water first, and then the cold.

- Transfer your shower gel, shampoo, and conditioner to brightly colored pump dispensers that contrast with the tub and wall tile. A rubber band around the shampoo will help you tell it from the conditioner. Or, purchase brands that provide inclusive bottle design with tactile differentiations, such as Clairol Herbal Essences or L'Occitane products that come with brailled labels.
- Use a shower caddy to organize your bath products.
- Replace your toilet seat with one that contrasts in color with the commode.
- To keep the bathtub from overflowing, you can float a brightly colored sponge to help you see the water level.



## Getting Work Done in your Home Office

- Use adjustable flex-arm and gooseneck lamps in areas where you will be reading, writing, and paying bills. A floor lamp on wheels can move with you around your work area.
- Cover a shiny or glossy desk with a cloth or desk pad to minimize glare.
- Ask your bank about large print and raised-line checks. They are larger than standard checks, have larger, bolder print, and include a larger check register.
- Large print and talking calculators can help you balance your checkbook and pay bills.
- Mark your file folders with a few key words in bold marker and large print labels.
- Color-code your household files with fluorescent Post-it® notes, colored stickers, or brightly colored fluorescent markers.
- Place a strip of fluorescent warning tape on the edges of your desk and file cabinet drawers to alert you when they are open.
- Close drawers immediately after using them and always push your chair back under your desk.

## **PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT:**

### Keitzer Check Writing Guide

The Keitzer Check Writing Guide is a flexible, durable guide that will hold any standard check. For easy orientation, simply place a check in the Guide Slide, face up, with the upper left corner of the check on the slant of the guide. The check rests against two stops; one along the bottom and one on the right end.

For more information on the Keitzer Check Writing Guide, please visit [aph.org](http://aph.org).





# Transportation: Getting Around

If you've been diagnosed with a low vision condition, it's possible you've learned that you are no longer able to drive. When to stop driving is probably one of the most difficult decisions you will make. It can be helpful to make that decision by talking with your doctors and close family members.

As you start these discussions, it's helpful to learn about the many transportation options that are available to you:

- Depending on the type of vision loss you have, it may be possible to continue driving with a bioptic lens system.
- Use ride sharing services, such as Uber and Lyft. GoGoGrandparent helps older adults connect with ridesharing services, including Uber and Lyft, without using smartphone apps by calling 855.464.6872.
- Learn about accessible public transportation in your area.
- Use local or county paratransit services.
- Hire your own personal driver.

You can learn more about driving and transportation options at [www.visionaware.org](http://www.visionaware.org).



## Enjoy Yourself – Recreation & Leisure

Recreation and leisure activities are an important part of everyone's life. With some simple modifications and helpful technology, you can stay active – and maybe even try something new.

**TOP TIP:** Before you start any sport or physical activity, talk with your physician and eye doctor to learn how you can stay healthy and safe while exercising.

- Visit your local community center or gym to get information about designing a safe and effective fitness program.
- You can adapt your current fitness equipment by marking your settings with contrasting tape, raised dots, or large print.
- Stay fit and keep exercising with a wide range of adapted fitness activities, including walking, hiking, running, yoga, bowling, cycling, swimming, and more.

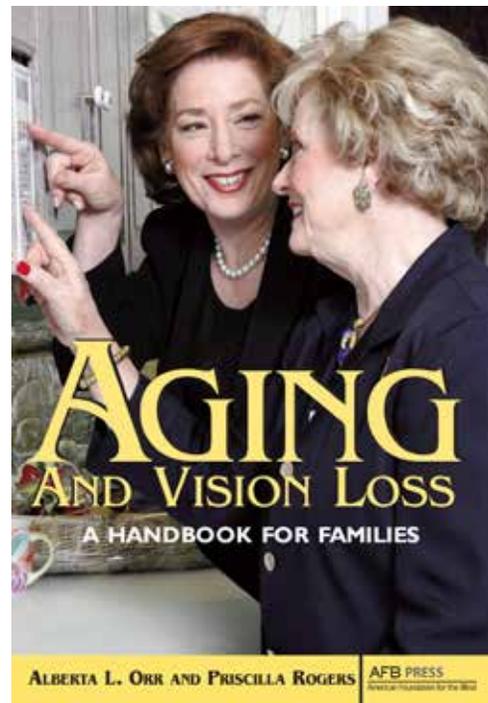
- Keep reading with large print, audio, braille, eBooks, and digital magazines and newspapers.
- Keep enjoying your favorite card and board games, as well as large print crossword puzzles and word searches.
- Stay current with cultural activities and enjoy movies, museum “touch tours,” theater, and concerts.
- Keep your mind and hands busy with crafting, knitting, crocheting, pottery, and painting.
- Stay in touch with nature by continuing your gardening and yard work.

**PRODUCT SPOTLIGHT:**

*Aging and Vision Loss*

*Aging and Vision Loss: A Handbook for Families* offers reassuring and helpful information on meeting the needs of a family member who is losing their vision, with resources for family caregivers.

For more information on *Aging and Vision Loss*, please visit [aph.org](http://aph.org).



# Technology Tips and Products

There are a variety of low-tech and high-tech products that can assist you in your leisure and work activities. These are just some of the tools that can help you get started.

**TOP TIP:** Don't be afraid of technology. Stay informed of new technologies and ways to learn.

## LOW-TECH

- **APH Signature Guide:** The small, pocket-sized frame of the APH Signature Guide provides an opening with elastic band to guide your writing, as well as a rubber backing to prevent sliding – all of which help you sign your signature with ease.
- **Bold Line Paper:** This paper, with widely spaced, thick, black lines on a white background, makes it easier for people with low vision to complete written tasks.
- **EZ Fill Pouring Aid:** EZ Fill is a device that aids in filling containers, such as a glass or cup. The aid hangs on the edge of the container, and when liquid fills to about one inch from the top, the device produces an audible signal, alerting the user.



## HIGH-TECH

- Jupiter Portable Magnifier: Jupiter is very easy to use. This powerful magnifier allows you to continue those activities that bring joy to everyday life, while exploring new opportunities for lifelong education. Excellent for reading a book or prescription bottle labels.
- Zeitgeist Talking Time Machine: This portable device tells time, automatically adjusts to Daylight Savings Time and leap years, shares the day of the week, and provides ten different alarms each with a separate signal. Spanish version also available.
- Video Mag HD: The Video Mag HD provides crystal-clear, full-color images by magnifying whatever appears under its auto-focus HD camera by 2 to 13 times. Ideal for viewing recipes, labels, price tags, receipts, and more.



# ABOUT VISIONAWARE.ORG

VisionAware.org is a program within APH's ConnectCenter initiative, and serves adults who are losing their sight. VisionAware provides comprehensive and timely information, step-by-step daily living techniques using images and videos, and a supportive online community.

Getting Started is a publication of the American Printing House for the Blind, and is available in print and online at VisionAware.org. Our mission: APH empowers people who are blind or visually impaired by providing accessible and innovative products, materials, and services for lifelong success.

To support APH and the programs and services we offer for older adults with vision loss, please donate at [www.visionaware.org](http://www.visionaware.org).

Follow us: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram, YouTube

Listen to our Change Makers podcast about vision loss and those who are making a difference for blind and visually impaired people worldwide.



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The 2020 Getting Started booklet was funded in part by the Reader's Digest Partners for Sight Foundation. Partners for Sight is dedicated to increasing the self-reliance and dignity of blind and visually impaired persons. We believe these individuals should have the tools and resources necessary to lead independent, productive lives. Through our support of non-profit organizations that share this philosophy, we're making the world easier to navigate for thousands of people, every day.



Additional support provided by:

The CTA Foundation is the charitable foundation affiliated with the Consumer Technology Association and has the mission to link seniors and people with disabilities with technology to enhance their lives.



The Older Individuals who are Blind Technical Assistance Center is a part of the National Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision and focuses on agencies serving older individuals who are visually impaired. The OIB-TAC provides a variety of training and technical assistance activities to programs addressing the areas of community outreach; best practices in provision and delivery of services; program performance, including data reporting and analysis; and financial and management practices, including administrative compliance. The OIB-TAC community of practice ([www.OIB-TAC.org](http://www.OIB-TAC.org)) is designed to facilitate training, technical assistance, interagency collaboration, and electronic discussion among service providers.



