

Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services



Guide to Independent Living for Older Individuals Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired

— TEXAS —
WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS
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Texas Workforce Solutions comprises the Texas Workforce Commission, 28 local workforce development boards and our service-providing partners. Together we provide workforce, education, training and support services, including vocational rehabilitation assistance for the people of Texas.

Welcome to the world of independent living at Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TWS-VRS). You received this guide because you may have been referred to our Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (ILS-OIB) program by a family member, doctor, rehabilitation counselor or other professional.

If this is the first time you've heard of TWS-VRS, a little background information may be helpful. TWS-VRS serves blind or visually impaired Texans. Our mission is to work in partnership with customers to assist them in achieving their individual goals. Through a variety of services and activities, we help customers build confidence in their ability to go any place, do anything and be exactly who and what they want to be — without being hesitant or insecure.

In fact, we like to think of ourselves as Texas Confidence Builders! The foundation of the Texas Confidence Builders philosophy is empowerment for customers and is achieved through emotional adjustment to vision loss, mastery of alternative techniques, coping with a sighted world and the ability to blend into society. TWS-VRS has prepared this guide to answer some of the questions you may have about vision loss and to assist you in living more independently. The guide includes basic

information about blindness, independent living, travel, communication, support systems and maintaining quality of life. We hope the information will assist you in discovering your specific needs, as well as finding solutions to problems that may be interfering with your ability to live as independently as you want.

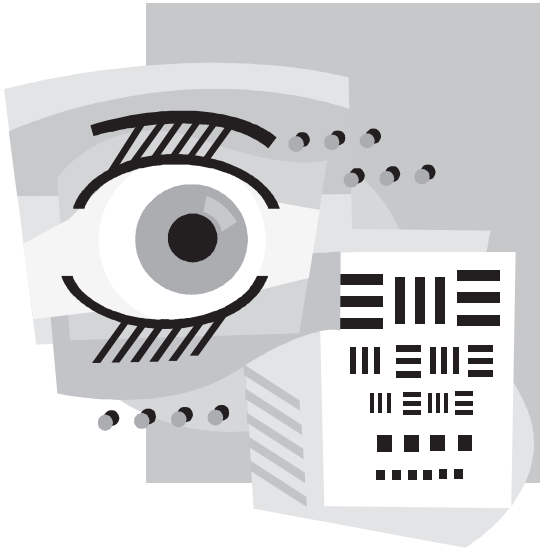
A TWS-VRS representative will contact you by telephone within the next 60 days to answer any questions you may have and evaluate whether you might benefit from further TWS-VRS services. If you have questions before then, don't hesitate to contact your local TWS-VRS office.

In the meantime, we hope you will start reading and using the information in this guide. It's never too soon to be more independent!

Adjustment to Blindness

Common Eye Diseases

Age Related Macular Degeneration



(AMD): An eye disease that results in a loss of central, “straight ahead” vision making it difficult to read or do close work. Remaining side vision makes object detection possible. AMD is the leading cause of vision loss in older Americans.

Cataract: A clouding of the lens, which causes a general loss of detail in what a person sees. People with cataracts see through a haze. The field of vision is unaffected, but glaring light conditions, distortion and double images can prove annoying. Surgery to replace the cloudy lens with a plastic lens usually resolves the problem safely and effectively.

Glaucoma: An eye disease, related to high pressure inside the eye that damages the optic nerve and leads to vision loss. Glaucoma affects peripheral or side vision.

Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP): An inherited disease that affects vision due to a breakdown of retinal tissues. Characterized by night blindness, retinitis pigmentosa frequently results in tunnel vision. Central vision can also be affected.

Detached Retina: Retinas detach for a variety of reasons and many can be surgically repaired. When an injury occurs, the hole or tear becomes filled with liquid, lifting the retina from its normal position and causing a defect in the field of vision. These can appear as dark shadows, either above or below the central field, as though a hanging curtain or wave was obstructing vision.

Diabetic Retinopathy: About 80 percent of people with diabetic retinopathy experience, at most, a swelling and leaking of retinal blood vessels which may cause blurring in the central visual field. Most cases develop into a “proliferate” state, where abnormal new blood vessel growth can rupture and bleed into vitreous, interfering with light passage through the eye — either in random patterns or throughout the visual field. Most commonly, some vision remains.

Legal Blindness

For legal and educational purposes, it is necessary to have a measurable point for determining when a person's vision is so impaired as to seriously interfere with his/ her education and livelihood, making him/her eligible for many benefits and services, such as rehabilitation services, social security disability benefits and income tax exemption. This measurable point has been designated as legal blindness. Thus, a person whose vision falls within the definition of legal blindness is considered to be legally blind.

Legal Blindness: *Visual acuity of 20/200 or less in better eye with best correction OR visual field of no greater than 20 degrees in the better eye.*

Agency Definition of Severe Visual Impairment: *Visual acuity greater than 20/200 but less than 20/70 in the better eye with best correction.*

What These Terms Mean:

- ✓ “20/200”: This person sees at 20 feet what the person with 20/20 vision sees at 200 feet.
- ✓ “In the better eye”: The eye that has the greater visual acuity.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Visual Acuity (VA): Detailed central vision, as in reading.

Central Visual Acuity (CVA): Ability to perceive the shape of objects in the direct line of vision.

Peripheral Vision (PV): Ability to perceive the presence, motion or color of objects outside of the direct line of vision (on each side and above and below the line of sight).

Visual Field (VF): Entire area that can be seen without moving the gaze, normally 180 degrees.

Tunnel Vision: Contraction of the visual field to such an extent that only a small area of visual acuity remains, giving the affected individual the impression of looking through a tunnel.

Blind Spot: Blank area in the visual field (corresponds to the light rays that come to a focus on the optic nerve). The blind spot's center is located 15.5 degrees temporal to fixation and 1.5 degrees below fixation.

The typical blind spot is oval in shape, approximately 7.5 degrees along its vertical axis and 5.5 degrees along its horizontal axis.

Binocular Vision: Ability to focus on one object and to fuse the two images (one from each eye) into one.

20/20 Vision: This refers to the line on the Snellen chart (an eye chart) labeled 20/20. The top number (numerator) is the distance between the chart and the person (usually 20 feet). The bottom number (denominator) refers to the size of test letters that the average person is able to read at the distance noted in the numerator. Normal vision also includes things such as normal field vision, color vision, etc.

Questions to Ask Your Eye Doctor

The questions listed below are designed to help you know what to ask your doctor so that you can become informed about your eye condition.



- What is my diagnosis?
- What caused my condition?
- Should I watch for any particular symptoms and notify you if they occur?
- What changes can I expect in my vision?
- Will my vision loss get worse?
- Will regular eyeglasses improve my vision?
- What medical/surgical treatments are available for my condition?
- What are the benefits of this treatment and how successful is it?
- What are the risks and side effects associated with this treatment?
- What can I do to protect or prolong my vision?

- Will dieting, exercising or other life-style change help?
- How can I continue my normal activities?
- Will any special devices help me with daily activities such as reading, sewing, cooking or repairing things around the house?

BRIGHT IDEA!

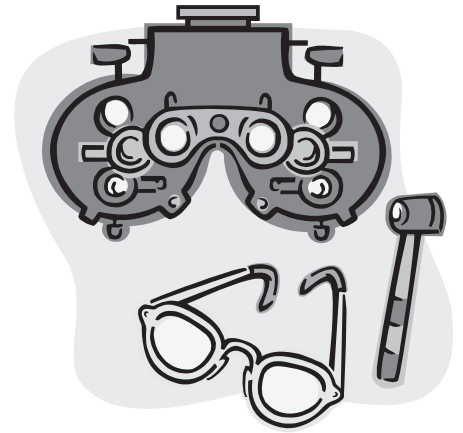
- ✓ Take notes or get a family member or friend to take notes for you.
- ✓ Keep asking questions if you don't understand.
- ✓ Ask your doctor to write down his/her instructions for you.



- Are training and services available to help me live better and more safely with low vision?
- Where can I find individual or group support to cope with my vision loss?
- What is my visual acuity? (Normal vision is 20/20)
- Should I see a retinal specialist or low vision doctor?
- Do you have any literature related to my diagnosis?
- How often do I need to return for exams?

Low Vision

If you have been told you have low vision, it means you still have some usable vision and can learn to use it more efficiently.



Your vision is a complex sense made up of your ability to see contrasts and sharp detail and to evaluate the location of objects in the environment.

Your eyes change as you age, but vision loss should not simply be accepted as a natural part of the aging process. In healthy aging, eye glasses or contact lenses can correct changes in vision. However, eye diseases can affect vision to the point that it cannot be fully corrected by ordinary prescription lenses, medical treatment or surgery. If your eye care professional has told you that your vision cannot be corrected and you still have some usable vision, you have what is called “low vision”.

Among older persons, low vision can result from eye conditions such as cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy or from a stroke.

If you have low vision, you may experience one or more of three types of vision problems:

- **Overall blurred vision** — which can be caused by cataracts, scars on the cornea or diabetic retinopathy;
- **Loss of central or center vision** — frequently caused by macular degeneration; and/or
- **Loss of peripheral or side vision** — most commonly caused by glaucoma or stroke.

There are optometrists with special training in low vision. Ask your eye care professional to refer you to a “Low Vision Specialist” for a special “low vision evaluation.” The specialist can determine the extent of your remaining vision and prescribe special optical devices that help make the best use of the vision you have by magnifying, filtering or increasing your usable field of vision. Examples of devices include:

- Hand-held or stand magnifiers for reading print or performing other near tasks;
- High-intensity lamps for reading and other close-up tasks like writing or sewing;

- Pocket-sized telescopes for distance vision for things like reading a street sign or identifying the number of an approaching bus; and,
- Closed-circuit televisions that magnify and project printed materials onto a television screen.

LOW VISION EXAMINATION

Depending on the amount of your remaining vision and visual acuities, a low vision evaluation with a low vision specialist may be beneficial. The goal of a low vision examination is to teach you how to use your remaining vision more effectively. When you visit a low vision specialist, he or she will complete a thorough exam and spend time discussing your specific vision problems.

What to Expect in the Exam

- **History:** The low vision specialist will review your eye, medical and functional history with you. He/She will ask extensive questions about your ability to perform day-to-day activities such as cooking, shopping, driving, writing, etc.

- **Preliminary Testing:** The Low Vision Specialist will perform a variety of special tests which may include contrast sensitivity, color vision, auto refractive scans and visual field examinations.
- **Low Vision Refraction:** Your refractive prescription will be measured with low vision techniques that make it easier for you to respond.
- **Low Vision Aid Exam:** A variety of low vision aids will be evaluated to determine their ability to help you function better. These may include: glare and light control, low vision magnifiers, independent living aids, microscopic reading eyewear, telescopic systems, closed circuit television systems and/or computer modifications.
- **Fitting and Training:** If low vision aids are prescribed, fitting and training will be performed to teach you how to properly utilize each low vision aid.

BRIGHT IDEA!



WHAT TO TAKE TO THE EXAM

- ✓ Any eyeglasses, sunglasses, reading glasses, magnifiers or other items you currently use to aid your vision.
- ✓ Samples of any reading material, newspapers, bills, newsletters or music you would like help in seeing.
- ✓ A list of medications you are taking (including over the counter and herbal remedies) OR bring all of your medications.
- ✓ Your insurance information (cards, forms, etc.).
- ✓ Any records or information you have on your eye problems.
- ✓ Plan to have someone drive you to your examination as your eyes may be dilated during the exam.

Using Visual Aids

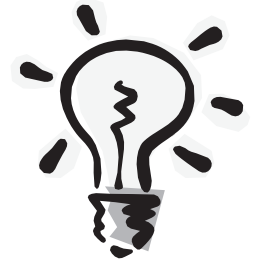
Low vision aids can be expensive and should be purchased with care. To assure the most satisfaction and success using vision aids, a *low vision evaluation* is a **MUST!**

Your eye specialist will help you choose the proper eyeglasses and can suggest other visual aids that may be useful to you. Be sure and tell the specialist or salesperson exactly what you will be using the visual aid for and, if possible, take along an example of the task to test it in the store.

Some specialists will loan aids for you to try out at home or wherever you'll be using them. If you have the opportunity to “try before you buy,” take it. What works great in the store might not work the same with lighting conditions in your home or office.

Before you buy a visual aid, be sure you know the company's return policy. If you are not satisfied with your purchase, you'll want to be able to return it — or at least get an exchange.

BRIGHT IDEA!



KNOW YOUR MAGNIFIERS

- There are no standards for magnifier power ratings. One company's 3X magnification might be another's 2X. A better way to compare is "diopter" strength. Four diopters equals one power.
- The quality of the magnifier can make a big difference. Some inexpensive magnifiers have a "sweet" viewing spot, with color distortion away from the center of the lens.
- Better lenses (known as aspheric) are made from ground glass for less distortion.
- Asplanatic magnifiers allow more light to pass through. This generally applies to the high-powered lenses.
- Rectangular magnifiers are limited in lens power and are designed to be held in the right hand.

BRIGHT IDEA!



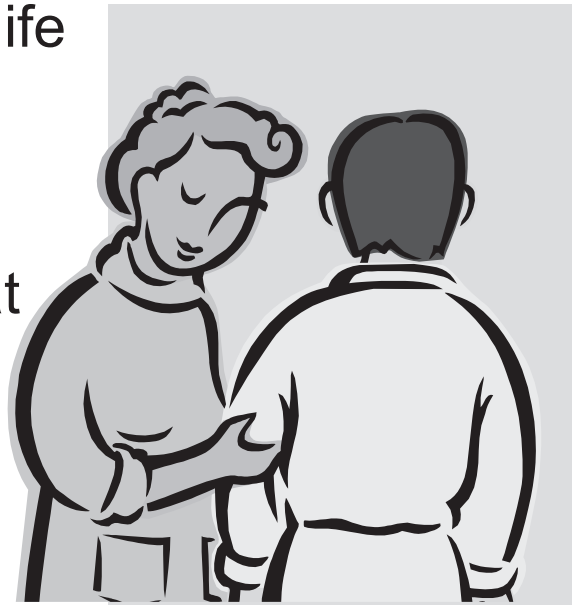
FOCUS ON MAGNIFIERS

All hand-held magnifiers have a focal point—where the image is sharpest. When you move the magnifier closer to an object, it may not appear as large or sharp. Moving the magnifier beyond the focal point will blur the image and eventually cause it to appear to flip over. The more powerful the spectacles, the nearer to your eye the object must be. With very high magnification, the object will be very close to you. Examining the device while performing the task is the best test before making a purchase.

EMOTIONAL ASPECTS **OF VISION LOSS**

Although each person's reaction to the diagnosis of serious, irreversible vision loss is different, for most people this is emotionally devastating news. When you received the news, you probably left your physician's office feeling very alone and convinced that the worst had happened, that there was no cure and no hope of ever

leading an active, independent life again. To make matters worse, you were probably unaware of the many organizations and agencies in your community that specialize in helping people with serious vision loss to learn new skills and to maintain independence.



Between the time of the diagnosis and the time that people become actively engaged in learning new skills, people new to vision loss must deal with the following:

- The impact of their diagnosis;
- Learning about their specific eye condition and its implications;
- Reconsidering self-concepts;
- Addressing issues related to family and friends;
- Thinking about a host of practical issues related to continued independent living and/or employment; and
- Coping with a wide variety of emotions

Grief is a natural response to significant vision loss. The purpose of grieving is to face loss and find ways to adapt to it. In

other words, grief brings a person from the stage of asking “Why did this happen to me?” to progressing to “How can I move forward?” Many people have found that their emotional reactions to vision loss resemble those emotions experienced with other significant losses in their lives. The ways in which they coped with the emotional grief from those losses and how they rejoined the mainstream of life are similar. During this grieving process you are likely to experience some or all of the following phases of grief:

ABOUT GRIEVING

For each person with vision loss, the process of grieving is likely to be different. No one knows for sure what steps this process will take or how long it may last for you. For some, the period of deep grief may last only a few days or weeks, for others it may last for months.

It is important for you to remember that during this time, you will need to rely on the understanding, sensitivity and support of your family and friends, as well as the services provided by the many professionals, support groups/clubs and agencies listed in this packet. They can all work together to assist you to find the best way to cope with your vision loss, to live independently, to have a full and active social life and to continue to be productive in the work force.

SHOCK AND DENIAL

Immediately after learning about your significant vision loss, you may experience a feeling of disbelief. You just do not want to believe that this loss is happening to you. It may seem like more than you can handle all at once.

Reaction And Purpose: You may experience sleep disturbances, flashing in and out of the news, high anxiety or numbness. These behaviors are part of your unconscious defense mechanism that protects you until you are better able to deal with your vision loss. The first task in grief work is to accept the situation — your vision loss — as a reality.

Panic: Feelings of fear about your vision loss may affect your ability to make decisions or to think about day-to-day activities. You may become preoccupied and think about little else other than your vision loss. This preoccupation with your vision loss can cause feelings of inadequacy. These feelings of inadequacy can lead to panic, as tasks that you once mastered now become frustrating and

difficult to accomplish. You may often think in terms of giving up an activity rather than attempting a new approach.

What To Do: Make sure the significant people in your life are available for you at this time. They may need to repeat the information to you and remind you to take the basic steps needed to care for yourself. You may need to state what you need. Remember they may be going through their own issues surrounding your vision loss. When you begin to realize the full impact of the vision loss you are experiencing, you may express this loss through emotions, such as sadness or anger.

ANGER

As you begin to move out of your depression, you may have more energy and can express feelings of anger. You may not even realize that you had such feelings. Expressing your anger may help you to begin to direct your grief outward. It may allow you to move beyond feeling that “life is not fair.”



Reaction And Purpose: Some people displace their anger and misdirect it toward themselves, others and life in general. You may alternately shout and be withdrawn. The purpose of this anger is to face and express the overwhelming feelings about the loss.

What To Do: Ask your loved ones to help you work through your anger. Part of this will be realizing that you will need to redirect your energy into constructive problem solving by investigating available resources and educating yourself with your eye disease and alternative methods in completing tasks.

BARGAINING



This is the phase where most people bargain with God or their doctor to take away the loss in exchange for promises of good behavior, etc. You may find yourself making vows that you have every intention of keeping in the hope that

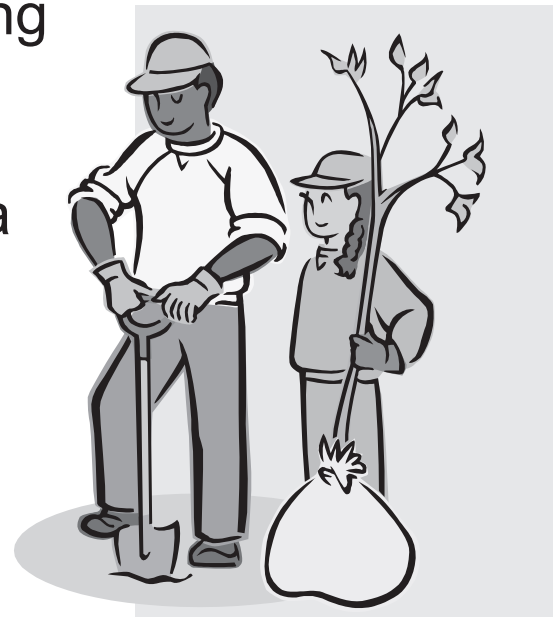
your eyesight will be restored. This is another form of denial.

Reaction And Purpose: Bargaining provides a chance to postpone loss and attempt to take control of the situation through self-imposed deadlines and exchanges of good behavior for restored eyesight. This is a normal response to loss.

What To Do: Ask your loved ones to respond to your needs, listen and stay available. You can help yourself by focusing on learning everything you need to with regard to your eye disease and alternative approaches to every day tasks.

DEPRESSION AND ISOLATION

You may feel very alone, believing that no one else could possibly understand the full impact of your vision loss. You may have a tendency to withdraw from your usual social life. You may feel helpless and hopeless. You may have asked yourself, “What is there to live for if I can’t see?”



Reaction And Purpose: You may experience physical symptoms such as insomnia, appetite changes and difficulty

concentrating on and managing routine tasks. You may also find yourself feeling a sense of guilt that surprises you. (“I should have gone to the doctor sooner.”

“Maybe I should have gotten a second opinion.” “I shouldn’t have read so much as a child.”) These feelings are all normal attempts to understand why your vision loss has occurred.

Resistance To Normal Activities: You may resist returning to your normal activities. Your attempts at doing these activities may appear to be too stressful or too painful. This is particularly true if you need to learn new skills or make significant life changes due to your vision loss.

What To Do: Ask others to listen so that you can express sorrow over your loss. This can provide structure for recognizing your loss and preparing for your life after loss and all the activities involved in adapting to your “new” life.

ACCEPTANCE

Finally, your vision loss stops consuming your life and you begin to realize that it may be difficult, but is not devastating. You can begin to discuss your feelings without anger and depression.

Reaction And Purpose: This is the transitional phase. This is the time to get busy and stay busy. Involve yourself in civic organizations, hobbies, etc. Continue to seek support and understanding.

Hope Returns: Eventually you will begin to experience periods of hope that things will improve and that the future holds promise once again. For many of you, this hope comes with learning new skills that will enable you to return to your normal activities.

Rebuilding: During this period you will realize that you can live in the world again and be an active part of it. You will have adjusted your life to the new reality your vision loss has created. Your vision loss will have become one, but only one, of the aspects of your personal identity.

What is Diabetes?

Diabetes is a disease in which the body does not make enough insulin or does not properly use insulin. The body breaks down the sugars and starches into glucose, when you eat food. Glucose is the basic fuel for the cells in the body. Insulin signals the cells to “open up” and take the glucose from the blood. If your body does not produce insulin (Type 1 diabetes) or properly use the insulin you do have (Type 2 diabetes), then the glucose can build up in your blood. Over time this buildup of glucose within your blood stream leads to complications of diabetes such as diabetic eye disease, kidney disease, nerve damage and more. By controlling your diabetes, you can prevent or slow down the advancement of these complications.

TYPES OF DIABETES

Type 1: This type of diabetes generally presents itself in childhood but can occur in older adults. People with Type 1 have little or no insulin production from their pancreas. People with Type 1 diabetes must take their insulin in order to survive. Approximately 10% of diagnosed diabetics have Type 1.

Symptoms:

These symptoms generally occur suddenly:

- Increased thirst
- Increased passing of urine
- Increased hunger
- Sudden weight loss
- Lack of energy



Causes:

- Family history of Type 1
- Pancreas injury due to viruses or accidents
- Loss of the insulin producing cells of the pancreas

Type 2: This type of diabetes generally presents itself in adulthood but is often now seen in childhood due to unhealthy lifestyle behaviors. People with Type 2 produce some insulin but the body does not properly process the insulin or does not produce enough insulin. This is described as insulin resistant since your cells do not “open up” and take the glucose in. Approximately 90 percent of diabetics have Type 2.

Symptoms:

These symptoms generally develop over a long period of time.

- Increased thirst
- Frequent passing of urine
- Increased hunger
- Dry, itchy skin
- Numbness/tingling in hands or feet
- Blurry vision
- Sexual functioning problems
- Lack of energy
- Cuts or sores that heal slowly.

Causes:

- Family history of diabetes
- Over 40 years of age
- Obesity/overweight
- Previously diagnosed with gestational diabetes
- Gave birth to a baby weighing over 9 pounds.
- Stress of an illness or injury
- Diagnosed with high blood pressure or high cholesterol
- African- Native- or Hispanic- American heritage

DIABETES MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Education: When you have diabetes, it is important to learn as much as you can about the disease and how to live a healthy lifestyle. Diabetes Educators are available to help with your education. These professionals can provide you with information to assist you in making good choices. Look into your personal insurance plan, (Medicare, Medicaid or other insurer) to find out what diabetes benefits are available to you for diabetes education and diabetes supplies.



Healthy Eating: Good choices extend to meal planning. Knowing what foods will raise your blood sugar, portion sizes, and times to eat will greatly aid you in managing your diabetes. Your Diabetes Educator will be able to assist you with meal planning. When you have scheduled your appointment to see your Diabetes Educator, make a list of what your favorite foods are so that you can ask what the best times, amounts are and frequency you can eat them.

Being Active: Exercise and other activities can lower your blood sugar level and is an important part of treating your diabetes.



Exercise helps you use the sugar in your blood, burn fat, improve strength and muscle tone, improve blood flow, build your heart and lungs, relieve stress, and makes you feel and look better. Even small

amounts of activity can make a difference in your blood sugar management. Chair exercises, resistance bands, gardening, walking, and housework are excellent examples of activities.

Taking Medication: While some people do not take medications because they control their diabetes with careful meal planning and plenty of exercise, most people with diabetes need to take medications. When you speak to your doctor, it is important that you understand how to take the medicine.

Here are a few questions you can ask:

- What is the name of this medication?
- Why am I taking this medication?
- When should I take this medication? How much?

- Are there any side effects?
- What should I do if I forget to take this medication?
- How will I know that this medicine is working?
- What should I do if a problem or emergency comes up?

The medications you take for your diabetes may be in pill form or by injection. Your Diabetes Educator can help you learn about your medications and how to take them. If you are having trouble organizing or taking your medicines because of your vision, your Diabetes Educator can discuss some tools and techniques to help.

Monitoring: Using a blood sugar monitor, blood pressure monitor, weight scale, and other at home devices can help you see changes in diet, activity, medication and your body. Talking monitors are available for people with visual impairment. Ask your Diabetes Educator and insurance company what is available for your use. By monitoring, you can identify and treat problems before they become serious.





It is also important to keep up with the tests done at the Doctor's office. These lab tests such as your Hemoglobin A1c, albumin, creatinine, cholesterol, and triglycerides give you information about your diabetes management and the risk of complications of diabetes. Be sure to discuss any lab results that are not in the normal range with your Doctor.

Problem Solving: What needs to be done to manage your diabetes changes every day? You need to know how to respond when your blood sugar is high, when it is low, during days you are sick or having a surgery or procedure. Talk to your Diabetes Educator about these problems.

Healthy Coping: Diabetes is not easy to live with. It is a chronic disease and most people need the support of not only their healthcare team, but family and friends as well. Having a good support system is important. Depression is common in people with diabetes. If you are feeling down or

without energy or interest in doing things you normally enjoy, you may be depressed. Let your Doctor and Diabetes Educator know and they can help you find ways to manage the stress.



Reducing Risk: When your blood sugar is kept as close to normal as possible, then you can slow down or even stop the progression of the complications of diabetes. Doing all of the behaviors such as healthy eating, being active, taking your medication, monitoring, problem solving and healthy coping will help you reduce the effect your diabetes has on your health. Be sure to see your eye doctor, your dentist, your podiatrist and other specialists as well as your regular doctor. Take care of your feet and skin. Brush your teeth. Get plenty of rest. All of these things help you create a healthy lifestyle.

IDEAS & TIPS FOR PEOPLE WITH VISION LOSS

There are many ways you can organize and label items around your home for easier organization, identification and retrieval. The following suggestions are organized by major daily activities. Use these tips — or come up with your own ideas — to achieve your goal of being independent and self-sufficient.

Organizing and Labeling

Learning a different way to organize yourself and/or your possessions may be helpful. Being able to quickly find items you use every day helps relieve stress and anxiety.

Depending on the items you want to organize, you may find that using boxes of various sizes and shapes, labeling or color-coding is helpful. For example, each day all incoming mail can be collected in a shoe box. Food,



medicines and other items can be easily identified using labeling techniques.

The first place to look for items that may help you use your vision better or learn a new way to do things is in your home or a local office supply store. There may be a variety of labeling materials already in your home, such as scotch tape, Velcro, safety pins, rubber bands, bread or garbage bag ties, index cards, shoe or cereal boxes, glue, glue guns, buttons, paper clips, jars, baskets, binders, colored tacks and finger nail polish. Other labeling materials include strategically placed rubber bands, puff paint and color-coded tabs or tape.

BRIGHT IDEA!

Use a felt-tip pen to mark medicine bottles or canned goods with single letter to identify the contents (e.g. “N” for nitroglycerine, “V” for Valium; “B” for beans and “C” for corn).



FOOD & KITCHEN TIPS

GROCERY SHOPPING

- Many grocery stores will provide shopping assistance. Contact your local grocer to find out what types of assistance are available, how to arrange it ,etc.
- Some stores offer a “pull and order” service, meaning they’ll fill your advance



order for groceries. This option can save money — especially if you pay for transportation and the driver has to wait for you to shop. On the down side, the store may not pull the name brands you want. Your grocer can give you more details.

- Grocery delivery may be another option, especially if you live in a small town. The store may charge a delivery fee, but it still may be cheaper and less hassle than arranging and paying for transportation. There are also some grocery warehouses that deliver for a fee; however, you may not have as wide a selection of products to choose from.
- In many communities, meal delivery programs such as *Meals on Wheels* are available to people who are eligible.

ORGANIZING

- Assemble all ingredients, utensils and recipe materials on a tray to organize and to assist in transporting items between workstations.
- Fill a large saltshaker with flour for dusting baking pans, making gravies, etc.
- Put salt and pepper in clear shakers to easily see the difference.
- As each ingredient is used, put the container away or push it to the back of your work area. If interrupted, you will know what ingredients you have used.
- Always have pot holders, oven mitts, trivets and etc. ready for use.
- Use a timer rather than visually checking the items you are cooking.
- Close doors and drawers immediately after use.
- Store knives in a knife holder, a separate box or drawer.
- Place a knife in a large bowl or knife holder for easy retrieval between cuttings.
- Use scissors more often than knives, especially for tasks such as cutting pizza, skinning chicken, chopping herbs, etc.
- Put additional lighting around work areas.

- Store cooking items or utensils that you don't use in a separate location or get rid of them. This will alleviate stress and make locating desired items much easier and faster.

COOKING



- A little salt in the frying pan will prevent splattering fats.
- Use a muffin tin for baking potatoes, stuffed peppers or tomatoes; this makes it easier to locate and remove from the oven.
- Cook bacon in the microwave or by baking on cookie sheets to avoid turning.
- Use covered containers to toss salads and shake-mix instant pudding.
- Wet vegetables when peeling to make it easier to determine if all of the peel has been removed.
- Use a mustard (yellow) or ketchup (red) squeeze bottle from a picnic set for squeezing oil into a pan.
- To drain foods, empty food into a colander in the sink or use a slotted spoon to

remove food from the pan and then allow the hot liquid to remain so that it will cool.

- Measure water before boiling it.
- Cut round vegetables/fruit in half before slicing or chopping, then place on cutting board with flat side down to prevent rolling.

MEASURING

- Separate measuring spoons and cups, individually, for easier identification. Bend the metal handles at a 90-degree angle to dip into the substance when measuring solids and liquids.
- Use one set of measuring cups of different colors for wet ingredients and another for dry. If you have only one set, dry well between uses.
- Store liquids in large mouth jars so that you can “dip” out the correct amount needed, using individual measuring spoons.
- Use a clean eyedropper for measuring extracts or flavorings in which the recipe calls for a few drops.
- Place oil in the refrigerator and allow it to get cold before pouring or measuring so that you can “feel” as you measure.

- Mark measurements on a large glass-measuring cup with Hi Marks™ glue, puff paint or assorted color tabs.
- Use nesting measuring cups and spoons.

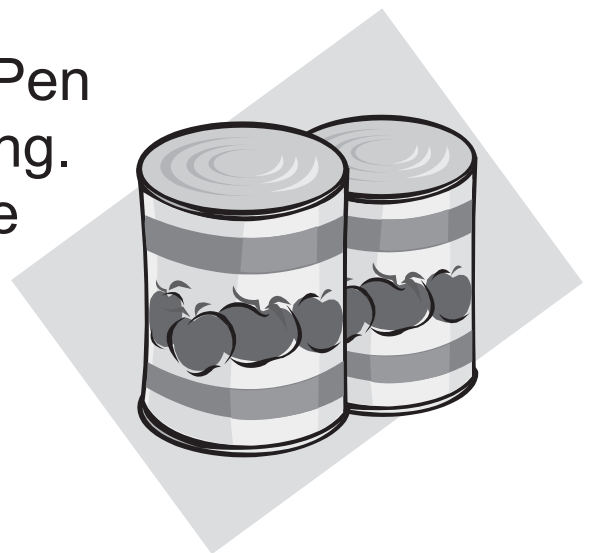
USING LIQUIDS

- Pour liquids into contrasting colored containers, such as coffee into a white mug, milk into a dark blue glass.
- Pour liquids over a sink, bowl or tray. Listen for the changing sound of the pouring as the container fills. The sound is loud and clear when you first pour as the container is filled the sound fades out.
- To remove hot liquids, use a syringe type baster.
- Use a large tray to assist in transporting ice cube trays to the freezer.
- Place your index finger of the hand holding the cup over the rim and inside the container as you pour. When you feel the liquid, stop pouring. Also, the use of a liquid level indicator can alert you when liquid nears the top of the glass and you should stop pouring to avoid overflow.
- Pour slowly and increase your speed, as you feel comfortable.

- Floating objects such as ice cubes or a clean ping-pong ball can help in determining whether a glass is full.
- Feel the weight. The weight of the containers indicates whether it is full.
- Feel the temperature. Feel the outside of the container to determine.
- Use a liquid indicator. Place the prong of the liquid level indicator (such as a Say When) inside a glass or cup. When the liquid reaches the prong and buzzes, stop pouring.

Labeling Canned Food and Utensils

- Remove the label on certain items only. For example, if you have green beans and corn then remove the label on all your corn. You will then have them separated by label.
- A talking device known as a Pen Friend can be used for labeling. After programming the device you can label and read labels for a variety of items that you select.



- For organizing canned goods, write the type of food on an index card (i.e. “GB” for green beans, “C” for corn, etc.) with a felt tip marker and attach it with a rubber band. If you have space, all cans of the same type could be placed in a row in the pantry.
- Organize your pantry into shelves with different categories of items. For example, the first shelf is canned vegetables, second is canned fruit, third is canned meats, etc.
- Use shoe boxes to keep the same kind foods in and label boxes using the Index card method.
- Set up a rubber band system to identify your canned foods such as one rubber band for corn, two for green beans, three for soup, etc.
- Use empty cereal boxes as dividers between pantry items. Label items with any type of adhesive roll tape. Ex: masking tape, black electrical tape, colored tape, etc.
- Wind contrasting tape (candy cane style) around the handles of pots, utensils, tools, etc. to easily recognize on various surfaces.

- Staple drinking straws onto cupboard shelves or drawers to create organizational areas.

Labeling and Using Appliances

- Make tactual markings or raised dots on all of your appliances at each increment to assist in locating settings by touch or by sight. The raised dots or heightened color help you set temperatures or other settings by touch. Use the following:
 - Nail polish
 - Tactile tape
 - Hot glue gun
 - Black marker
 - Hi Marks™
- Some appliance companies have Braille overlays for stoves and microwaves.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothing, full sleeves or ruffles when using the stove.
- Long hair should be tied back with a barrette or rubber band so that it will not get caught in electric mixers or other appliances, burned over the stove, etc.
- Remove loose-fitting or bulky jewelry before preparing food so that it does not get caught in utensils or appliances.
- Make sure your hands are dry before

handling electrical appliances and that the switch is in the “off” position.

- Observe your stove settings and use the clock method for turning the dial to certain settings. For example, the medium setting is at 6:00, the high setting is at 9:00, etc.
- Handles of pots and pans should be turned so that they do not extend over the edge of the stove.
- Do not place utensils or other objects in a sink in which there is a garbage disposal.
- Do not turn stove burners on until you have centered pans on the burners.
- To check burners for heat hold your hand high above the burner and lower slowly. This will allow you to feel the heat prior to touching the burner.
- Turning the kitchen lights off or dim lighting makes the blue flame on a gas-stove burner easier to see. Use fireplace matches or a butane lighter to light the burner.
- Use colored tape or a tactile marking at different temperatures on an oven dial or at different settings on washer/dryer dials.
- Use front burners whenever possible to keep from reaching over a burner that may be hot.

HOW TO MARK APPLIANCES

Many people experiencing vision loss find it helpful to mark appliances or other items that they have difficulty seeing so that they can continue to use them. A variety of items can be marked including — but not limited to — medicine bottles, washable fabrics, microwave ovens, washing machines, dryers, stoves, ovens, air conditioner/heater thermostats and remote controls.

Usually, people use some type of raised surface to mark portions or degrees of the controls. Some items that can be used are puff paint (fabric paint that dries raised, can be found at craft stores), Velcro, Hi-Marks™ or bump dots (the last two are specialty items that can be ordered from a catalog).

To mark appliances and items put raised dots to show the most frequently used settings. Before marking an item, make sure it is clean. On most appliances you can use an all-purpose cleaner to remove grease and dust. Here are some ideas for marking common appliances:

Stoves: Put one dot on the knob at the low setting and two dots at the high setting. If the knob does not “click” or stop at “off” or “zero” put a line on the stove so you can feel where the knob lines up to indicate the “off” position.

Microwaves: You may want to put a raised dot on the number “5” to orient yourself to where the numbers are and push the numbers from memory. If you need more tactile information to use the microwave you can mark the odd numbered buttons. You might also mark frequently used buttons such as the start or the popcorn features. If your microwave has a *one minute* or *minute plus* feature, you may want to mark this button as well.

BRIGHT IDEA!



BE CREATIVE

You can use these procedures to mark just about any item. It is important to remember only to mark the most used settings, not every setting. Simple is better!

CONTRASTING

- Trays or place mats help create a contrasting background on counter tops. On a light colored counter top place a dark place mats or tray. This will make finding cups and utensils easier.
- Use a dark cutting board for light foods and vice versa. There are cutting boards available that are black on one side and white on the other side.
- Use a pot with flat color (rather than aluminum) on the inside to assist in seeing boiling water and foods in the pot.
- Mark kitchen dials with bright contrasting tape, Hi Marks or puff paint.
- Mark the off position and most frequently used temperatures.
- Use contact paper to create contrast on kitchen counters — dark for rolling white pie crust and light for mixing brownies in a clear bowl.
- Use a tablecloth or place mat that is a different color than the plate.
- Serve food on contrasting colored dishes, such as creamed corn in a dark dish and red gelatin salad on a white dish.
- A contrasting, non-slip mat (such as a Dycem pad) can be used to prevent one's

cutting board, mixing bowl or plate from slipping when in use.

EATING

- To cut meat, first feel for the edge of the meat with a fork. Then take the knife, line it up behind the fork and begin cutting.
- To peel food, begin by feeling for the edge and then turn the item counterclockwise while peeling.
- It is easier to determine if the peel on vegetables has all been removed when the vegetable is wet. This can be determined tactilely also.
- Place a high intensity lamp by your seat to illuminate your plate if more lighting is helpful to you.
- To aid in locating the position of different food on a plate, use a clock system. For example, meat at the top of the plate will be at 12 o'clock and vegetables at the bottom of the plate would be 6 o'clock and so on.
- Use frosted and colored drinking glasses.
- Avoid bright, busy patterns in choosing tablecloths, place mats, etc.

LIGHTING FOR SAFETY & COMFORT

Good lighting is critical for safety and performance, often making it possible for a person with low vision to continue reading, eating, sewing and writing. In an area designated for general use, such as a living room or kitchen, it is important to have illumination, ideally with dimmer switches. Both the type of light used and its placement should be evaluated.

TYPES OF LIGHT

- **Fluorescent Lighting:** Provides good overall illumination, but can cause glare if daytime bulbs or cold blue light is used. Energy-saving fluorescent bulbs similar to warm incandescent light are available. Halogen light may also cause glare.
- **Spot Incandescent Lighting:** Use spot lighting wherever possible. Lamp shades should be opaque, shielding the light source and at the same time directing the light onto a work area. Metal lamp shades may become hot to touch unless indoor flood bulbs are used.

- **Direct Sources of Bright Light:** Filter natural sunlight with thin curtains that permit light to pass through. Filter artificial lighting with lamp shades.

MORE LIGHTING TIPS

- A small light or reflective tape located within the switch or illuminated switch plates allows for visibility and access at night.
- Pressure-type light controls are easier to use than standard toggle switches.
- Lamps that turn on by a simple touch are available.
- Ceiling lights controlled by a pull cord should have a cord that hangs at eye level, to avoid excessive reaching up and risking a loss of balance.
- Light timers, preset for certain times, are helpful if adding light switches is not feasible.
- Eliminate sunlight streaming through windows with thin draperies or Venetian blinds, unless they make it too dark.
- Polarized window glass or tinted Mylar shades eliminate glare without loss of light.
- Glare from unshielded light sources can

be reduced by using frosted light bulbs and placing shades on exposed bulbs.

- To control glare from light or sunlight on highly polished waxed floors, use carpets or no-slip matte floor finishes that diffuse rather than reflect light.
- Reposition lamps that cause glare; make sure the bulb is not visible.
- Use wall-mounted valances or cove lighting to conceal the source of light and spread it indirectly upon the ceiling and the floor to eliminate space between source and of glare.
- To eliminate furniture surface glare, use matte or dull surfaces on tabletops and non-reflective material on chair seats.
- Rearrange living room furniture to best utilize light, to avoid glare from windows and to get as close as possible to the television.
- Wear sunglasses, a hat or visor to shade your eyes and ease the adjustment to bright light.
- Put additional lighting around work areas.

BRIGHT IDEA!



STRATEGIC LIGHTING

- ✓ Avoid distracting reflections from windows on the TV screen. Use natural light whenever possible.
- ✓ Light switches should be approximately 32 inches from the floor and located directly on the outside or inside of doorways. This helps to orient the person walking across a darkened room to turn on a light.
- ✓ Light switch plates should be of a color that contrasts with that of the wall to allow for visibility. If the colors of the wall and switch plate are identical, color-contrasting tape around the borders of the switch plate will enhance its visibility.

FURNISHINGS

- Choose contrasting colors of throw rugs (e.g. dark brown on cream colored linoleum) and secure them with carpet tape for safety.
- Tie brightly colored ribbon bows to the ends of TV or radio antennae.
- Replace wall socket and light-switch covers with covers that contrast in color to the wall.
- Avoid bright, busy patterns in choosing tablecloths, furniture upholstery, ironing board covers and bedspreads.
- Hang clocks and pictures at eye level when sitting in chairs.
- Pay attention to floor surfaces. Plain-colored, unpatterned floor coverings are less confusing visually than carpets or tiles with floral or checked patterns that may lead to misjudgment of spatial distances.
- Keep a large flashlight in an easy to find spot at the bottom of dark closets.
- Door thresholds or saddles may not be seen clearly if they are of a color similar to the surrounding floor. This problem can be eliminated by placing brightly colored,

no-slip adhesive strips along the length of the threshold or by painting thresholds a contrasting color.

- Invest in a small television so the family member with low vision can then sit as closely as needed and choose the program. (Some people prefer color, others black-and-white.)
- Have appliance manuals and similar materials enlarged on a photocopier as received. Don't wait for an urgent need for that information.
- Put books and things with labels on middle shelves. Leave the top and bottom shelves for plants and larger decorations.
- Check with the local utility company for large-print thermostat attachments. Thermostats can be marked with puff paint.
- Place pet food and water on a small table to avoid stepping in it or on a contrasting colored mat.
- Purchase a large print or talking clock for your home.
- Small boxes are useful to keep items separated. Everything from socks to silverware may be stored this way.

Identifying Keys

- Nail polish painted on the head of a key will create a glossy, slippery feeling for easier identification or a piece of tape or a dot of finger nail polish could be placed on the house key.
- Use rubber caps found at hardware, office supply or general merchandise stores.
- Memorize distinguishing features of the key such as raised lettering or symbols, size, shape.
- File a notch on the head of a particular key.
- Color code keys with plastic hoods available at hardware and discount stores.



Laundry and Sewing Tips

- Use a turkey baster to fill a steam iron with water.
- Wash small items in a zipped pillow case or mesh laundry bag.
- Safety pin socks into pairs before washing.

- Mark washing machine and dryer controls with puff paint, high marks or contrasting tape.
- Mark most commonly used setting.
- Use sock sorters (available at discount stores) to keep pairs together, even in the laundry.
- Keep a magnet in the sewing bag to pick up a dropped needle or pin.
- Detergent pods are now available which do not require measuring.



- Make sorting laundry easier by using a “system.” A “V” cut in a label could identify a permanent press item, while a corner cut off a label indicates a colorfast item.
- There are special needles and threaders to make it easy to thread a needle.
- Staple a cloth tape measure at each inch or half-inch to use for all kinds of cloth measuring.

CLEANING

- Store cleaning supplies in a bucket. Then simply grab the bucket and carry it around the house when cleaning; this works for gardening tools, too.
- Wear an apron with large pockets when cleaning. The pockets can be used for cleaning materials or for misplaced items that are picked up while cleaning a room.
- Instead of a dust cloth, use an old pair of cotton gloves or socks placed over the hands.
- Wipe up anything that is spilled immediately.
- Make the bed once with great care; mark each sheet and blanket where it touches the corners of the bed with safety pins. Each time thereafter when the bed is made up, simply line up the corners.
- When you vacuum or sweep, divide room into sections, using furniture and walls as reference points. This can also be done barefoot for verification that the floor is clean.



- Set a paper bag near your work space to catch all garbage and scrap. Roll the top of the bag down a couple of turns and the bag will sit upright and remain open.

BATHROOM TIPS

- A clear plastic shower curtain allows more light into the shower area than an opaque or solid one.
- Consider purchasing a shower curtain which contains large pockets to hold body wash, hair care products, etc. and keep them within easy, safe reach.
- Use a contrasting color toilet seat cover so it is very obvious whether the lid is up or down.
- Buy soap that contrasts with the sink and bathtub. Floating soap is sometimes easier to find. Liquid soap dispensers are sometimes preferred. Soap-on-a-rope is also handy in the tub or shower.
- If shampoo and conditioner bottles look alike, place a large contrasting bump dot on the lid of the shampoo bottle to distinguish it from the conditioner.
- Try a lighted magnified mirror for applying cosmetics or shaving.

- Change medicine cabinet door to a sliding style.
- Place rubber bands on all personal items to distinguish between yours and someone else's.
- Put your items in one area all of the time.
- Squeeze entire tube of toothpaste into wide mouth jar or plastic container, then dip out toothpaste as needed. Another option for toothpaste is to use a pump dispenser for easier control, put toothpaste directly into your hand and scoop palm with brush or put toothpaste directly into your mouth and brush.
- Place your items in a specific container, box or basket all the time and transport them from your room to bathroom.
- Keep your items in a personal hygiene or makeup bag.

Personal Management

Medications

- Use pill organizers to keep track of medications. Check with your pharmacist to ensure it is safe to store your medications together.

- Use a single letter in felt tip pen or puff paint on the medicine bottles to identify the contents. For example, “N” on Nitroglycerine. If you are only taking one or two medications, a simple bump dot on the lid will distinguish one from the other.
- Use a rubber band system for organizing your medications. For example: 1 rubber band for heart medication, 2 rubber bands for stomach medication, 3 rubber bands for pain medication, etc.
- When getting prescriptions filled ask the pharmacist to identify each medication by name and the description of tablet or capsule (color, size) and then label each bottle as needed using large black print, Braille labels, rubber bands, etc. before leaving the counter.
- When given a prescription by the doctor, ask the doctor/nurse to read you the name of the prescription and its dosage so that you may document information in a notebook or digital recorder. There are now talking prescription readers available which can be ordered through specialty catalogs. When played back, information concerning dosage, proper way to administer, warnings, etc. can be heard.

- Record prescription instructions or write in Large Print in a notebook.
- If two bottles are shaped the same, put a rubber band around one of them.
- Since many medications are identified by color, there is potential confusion with “look-alike” pills. Medication should be identified by large-print labels. Many pharmacies will attach large print labels upon request.
- Don’t give up on independently measuring insulin and monitoring blood glucose; talk with a diabetes educator about the many options available. Items such as talking glucometers, talking blood pressure monitors, talking thermometers, talking weight scales, etc. are widely available and are effective if trained properly.



Clothing Tips

- Organize your closet by color and separate with cardboard dividers or paper hangers.
- Keep clothes organized and only keep seasonal items in closet.

- Hang two-piece outfits together on the same hanger.
- Use different types of hangers for different color clothes. For example: plastic for blue, wire for white, wire with paper for black



- Use the label found on the back of garments to create an identification system. For example: all blue clothes' labels are cut into a triangle, all brown are cut in half, all black are whole and all whites have no label, etc.

- Use identifying features on garments for identification. For example: lots of buttons, raised pictures/ letters/symbols/logos, special texture (felt, corduroy, velvet), no buttons, lace, zippers.
- Place safety pins on label to identify color (i.e. one for red, two for blue or facing one way for red, the other way for blue).
- Use puffy paint (used for decorating T-shirts and found at most stores like Target or Wal-Mart) to write shapes, dots or letters on the label, inside hems or inside waistbands (i.e., "BK" for black,

dots for blue, triangle for red, “D” for dark, “L” for light, etc.).

- A dot of Velcro could be placed on a belt of a certain color for easier identification.
- To match a skirt or pair of pants with a blouse, you could put one safety pin on the hem of each to know these items match.
- Store socks in a certain pattern for easier identification. For example: Roll all blue socks in a ball, leave all black one's straight, roll white ones with a cuff or vice versa.
- Socks should always be either on the feet or in the sock sorters.
- Use shoe boxes in drawers to separate socks, personal garments, etc.
- Organize jewelry with push pins on a corkboard. Fishing tackle boxes or cabinets with individual drawers are also good for organizing jewelry.
- Purchase a large print watch or talking watch (available at discount stores or mail

BRIGHT IDEA!



After using puff paint to label clothes, place them where they won't touch other clothes or objects and allow 24 hours to dry. It's usually best to do only a few items at a time.

order catalog).

Identifying Shoes



- Store shoes in original shoe boxes and label with index cards or tactile marking.
- Organize shoes by color in certain areas of your closet. For example: Blues on right shelf, black on the left shelf and white on floor.
- Place particular shoes in certain places all the time. For example: House shoes by the door, dress shoes under bed, etc.
- Place small flat head tacks underneath high heel shoe between heel and sole for identification.
- Use puffy paint to mark inside seam of shoe or bottom of shoe.
- Upon removal, tie shoes or clothes pin together for easy retrieval.

SHOPPING

Whether it's buying groceries, clothing, furnishing for your home or supplies for your favorite hobby, you have a number of shopping options. Whether you choose to

shop in person, order through catalogs or surf the Internet, there are a few things you can do to make your shopping experience pleasurable and safe.

SHOPPING IN PERSON

- **Shop with an agenda.**
Get organized before you go out. You may need to call ahead to find stores that have what you're looking for, ask questions, get directions, etc. Make a detailed list of what you're shopping for and any specifics you'll need (like measurements, amounts, colors, etc.).
- **Timing is everything.** To avoid feeling rushed and frustrated, you may wish to shop during off-peak hours, especially if you request someone to assist you as you shop. Ask your favorite stores what days and times are less hectic than others.
- **Shop with someone you trust.**
Sometimes it's smart to take a trusted friend or family member along on your

BRIGHT IDEA!



Don't be a victim of fraud! Only give your credit card and social Security numbers to businesses and people you know and trust!

shopping trip — especially if you're making a major purchasing decision. Your trusted companion may be more likely to give you objective information about the product and/or terms than someone who will benefit from the sale.

SHOPPING BY CATALOG

Shopping by catalog can save you time and the hassle of arranging (and perhaps paying for) transportation to the store. You can usually phone in your order, without having to fill out those order forms with the tiny spaces. You may not pay as much tax on items purchased through a catalog as you would at a store. And, depending on the company, purchasing via catalog may give you an “inside track” on discounts, overstocked items or special sales.

On the other hand, catalog shopping does not allow you an opportunity to inspect the merchandise before you buy. And, companies often add the costs of shipping to the order.

Having weighed the pros and cons, should you choose to order catalog purchases over

the phone, here are a few things that may help:

- If you are comfortable doing so, tell the customer service representative that you are visually impaired. This will help the service representative know how to be of the most assistance to you.

BRIGHT IDEA!



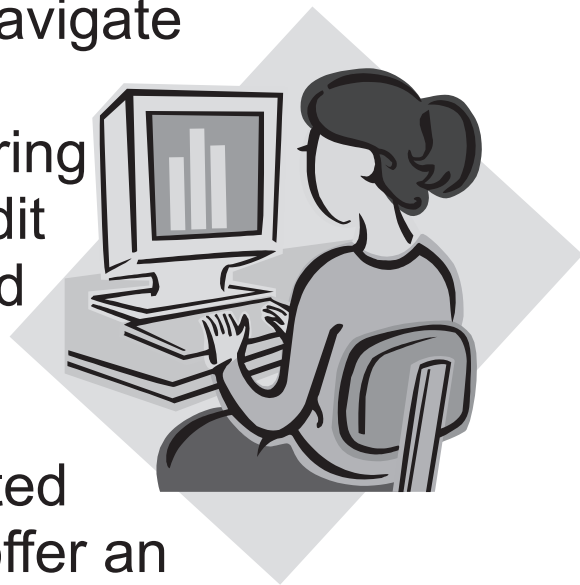
- ✓ Become a “valued customer” Cultivate a business relationship with your favorite stores and catalog companies. As they recognize you as a regular patron who appreciates their good customer service, they’ll likely make a real effort to keep your business.
- ✓ Some companies give discounts to senior citizens and/or people with disabilities. For instance, some retail stores have weekly senior shopping days where they offer reduced prices. Ask your favorite companies and stores for details about any discounts they offer.
- ✓ Be sure you know the return policies of companies you do business with—especially catalog companies. Many companies do not have flexible policies, so it’s important to know beforehand.

- Know the details about the item(s) you're ordering and be specific when placing the order. For example, the sales representative can better assist you when you say you need a "long-sleeved, mid-length, wool dress, size 10, to match red shoes" or "short-sleeved, polo-type shirt, 17-inch neck, to go with tan dress slacks."
- The telephone is an invaluable tool when you're doing comparison shopping between catalog companies. Most major catalog companies have toll-free numbers. If you need to use directory assistance for regular or toll-free numbers, remember that people who are legally blind can apply for an exemption from directory assistance charges. Contact your telephone company for more information.

SHOPPING ON THE INTERNET

People with visual challenges can now access the Internet using accessible computer programs such as ZoomText, JAWS, Window Eyes. This opens up a whole new world of shopping opportunities. If you plan to "cybershop," here are a few helpful hints:

- Consider having someone who has experience shopping on the Internet to assist you the first time or two you shop online. They can help you be sure the online businesses you're shopping with have appropriate privacy and security features.
- You may find that using a speech output program makes it easier to navigate online stores.
- If you're not comfortable sharing personal information like credit card numbers, addresses and phone numbers online, you can still use the Internet to shop for items you're interested in. Most company websites offer an option to order by phone.



Financial Matters

- Keep a list of billing addresses for your major bills in a notebook using your preferred format so that you always have the address accessible when an envelope has been mistakenly left out or lost.
- Keep track of billing dates on a calendar so that you know when to expect bills. Call customer service lines if you are

unable to read your bill, to inquire about your amount due and due date so that you can maintain your finances.

- Enlarge a check register to a full sheet of paper using a copy machine and keep in a binder.
- Large print checks are available from your bank. Contact the Customer Service Department of your bank to find out about current prices. They have several different names such as EZ Read Checks, Sight Line Checks and Guide Line Checks.
- You may choose to use a different compartment of your wallet or purse for organizing your money.
- When making a purchase have the clerk tell you the denominations of each bill so that you can organize them at the counter.

Money Tips

IDENTIFYING COINS

- Use your fingernail to assist in scraping side of coin:
- Pennies are smooth and larger than a dime.
- Nickels are smooth and larger and thicker than a penny.

- Dimes have a rough milled edge and are smaller than a penny.
- Quarters have a rough milled edge and are bigger than a nickel.
- A fifty cent piece has a rough milled edge and larger than a quarter.

IDENTIFYING PAPER MONEY

Use the following or similar technique:

- \$1 — Leave flat
- \$5 — Fold in half, width-wise
- \$10 — Fold in half, lengthwise
- \$20 — Fold in half, width-wise and lengthwise



CREDIT CARDS

If you carry some credit cards with you, here are some ways you might organize or mark them for easy identification:

- Arrange them alphabetically (i.e., Master Card, Sears, Visa)
- Use a credit card carrier with plastic sleeves and color code and/or tactually mark each sleeve.
- Cut notches in them (taking great care not to damage the magnetic strip on the back!). Use a sharp mat-cutting knife to cut one or more small “V” shapes on the

long side of the card so you can tactually identify each one. (This might be a project you could ask a friend or family member to help with.)

- When your signature is required, use a signature template, if necessary.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

- List emergency telephone numbers in large, bold print near the telephone or program them into a cell phone.
- Always shut drawers and doors; do not leave them half-open.
- Put chairs back in place; whenever possible position them against walls.
- Mark all overhead obstructions, such as bathroom and kitchen cabinets and doors.
- Remove small objects, such as foot stools, from the floor.
- Keep all hallways uncluttered.
- Clearly identify exits.
- Replace batteries on a regular schedule in smoke detectors.
- Make sure doorbell and phone can be heard.
- If appropriate, notify the local fire and police departments that the person living in the home has a visual impairment or is blind.

- Urban dwellers need to learn how to maneuver along busy sidewalks populated by children on skateboards or bicycles, delivery persons with carts and pedestrians. Mobility training to help people with low vision use their full complement of senses to maneuver safely is particularly important. Some problems that can pose threats to safety in rural areas include:
 - Unleashed pets and stray animals,
 - Drop-offs of terrain, or
 - Absence of paved roads or safe places to walk.
- Utilize contrasting color to attract attention to potentially hazardous elements of the environment. Risers and treads on steps and stairways should not be painted or carpeted the same color or carpeted with patterned material. Both may hamper recognition of step height and depth. Placing brightly colored orange or yellow no-slip adhesive strips along the length of each step will help with detection.
- Painted or papered stairway walls in a color lighter than the stairs can highlight the steps and enhance illumination as well.

- Objects that serve as balance supports, such as banisters and toilet and bathtub grab bars, should be visually highlighted by contrasting their color from the background.
- Attach friction tape or non-skid appliqués in a contrasting color in the tub or shower stall.
- To make it easier to unlock outside doors at night, place a small strip of reflective tape next to the key slot.
- Place strips of slip proof material in a contrasting or reflective color on the edges of steps.
- When possible make things bigger or get closer to objects when safe to do so.

Using Remaining Senses

Making use of your remaining senses may increase your ability to do the things you want to do. Using your remaining senses assists in learning to use non-visual techniques.

USING Your Hearing

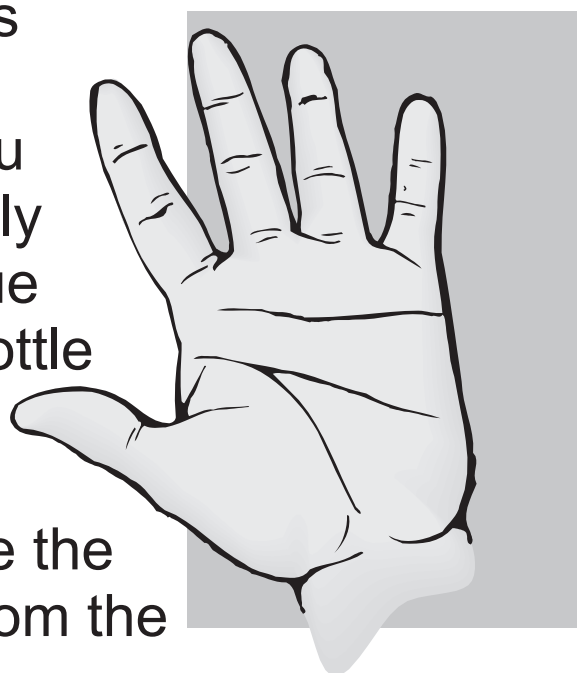
- There may be distinct sounds within your home or in your yard that help you

move about more easily. Sounds within the home may include the hum of the refrigerator, a ticking clock or a radio. Sounds in your yard may include traffic from the street or a wind chime.

- Many people who are experienced cooks already use their hearing to tell when the water boils or the flame is too high on the gas stove.
- In the kitchen, a quick check of canned goods might be done using hearing. Vegetables in liquid such as corn sound different than creamed style corn.
- Hearing is often used for identifying when water is boiling.

USING YOUR SENSE OF TOUCH

- This sense can be a valuable tool for identifying a variety of objects that you may not be able to see clearly. With practice, you may be able to learn to quickly identify objects by their unique features. The shape of the bottle of bleach may be different than the shape of the bottle of dish washing liquid. Maybe the shampoo bottle is different from the



conditioner. The cans of tuna are shaped differently from the cans of soup.

- Developing the sense of touch may help you identify clothes in your closet or items in the laundry. You may have some articles of clothing that have certain features that are different from anything else in your closet. These features might include texture of the fabric or the buttons.

USING YOUR SENSE OF SMELL

- Using the sense of smell can identify many products in the home. In the kitchen, cinnamon smells different from cloves and coffee smells different from cocoa.
- Smell is often used for identifying when food is done or water is boiling.
- There may be distinctive smells in your garden or smells from a local bakery.

Alternative Techniques For Being Independent

Alternative techniques are non-visual ways to do things using your other senses. If you have low vision or are legally blind, you already know that your vision works for some things, but not others. On top of that, many people find their vision changes from one day to the next; good on some days, poor on others. The environment changes, too. It may go from dark to light, cloudy to bright. Sidewalks or hallways may suddenly have steps, stairs or even drop-offs. Things like the quality and size of printed materials and the location of signature lines vary, too.

It can be frustrating when you can see to do some tasks one day, but not the next. What's a person to do? One thing you can do is to learn alternative techniques. Then, you can do the tasks that you want without worrying if you will be able to see perfectly to do them.

For example, identifying coins is a common problem. Have you ever felt rushed and

embarrassed fumbling to see what coins you have to make a purchase? It doesn't have to be that way. Using the simple non-visual technique of feeling if the edge of the coin is smooth or has ridges you can distinguish a nickel from a quarter. It is less conspicuous than using a magnifier at the checkout stand and doesn't call attention to yourself.

Because alternative techniques are non-visual, some people may think they are only for totally blind people. This is not true. Non-visual techniques are used by people who have perfect eyesight as well as those who don't.

Sighted people smell milk to tell if it is fresh and taste lemonade to see if it's sweet enough. Even with good eyesight, you can't tell these things by just looking. So you use your senses of smell and taste — non-visual methods. A sighted person who feels the baby formula to check the temperature or squeezes fruit to see if it is ripe is using touch as a non-visual technique. This list of examples is endless and demonstrates that using non-visual techniques is a normal part of life, regardless of how well you can see.

Some people postpone learning alternative techniques until they lose all hope of getting better sight. This is not a good strategy. It may be quite a while before you know if your vision will get better or worse. In the meantime, you want to be as independent as possible. Once you become dependent on others, it's hard to change. The longer you put off learning different ways to do things, the more difficult it becomes to start doing them.

Magnifiers, alone, will not solve your vision problems. They are good for some things, but not others. For instance, a magnifier may help you read the date on an egg carton, but is of no use when trying to tell if the eggs are ready to be turned over in the skillet. A magnifier may help you read the newspaper, but won't help you know if the peaches are ripe at the grocery store. Using non-visual techniques, the list of things you can do without a magnifier is practically endless.

HOW ARE ALTERNATIVE TECHNIQUES LEARNED?

The fastest way to learn non-visual techniques is to close your eyes while you learn them. This keeps your vision from distracting you. This may sound odd, but research shows that the harder you try to see, the less aware you are of what you hear and feel.

People who have difficulty keeping their eyes closed during training wear sleep shades to make it easier and more comfortable. Learning this way also helps take away the fear of being blind.

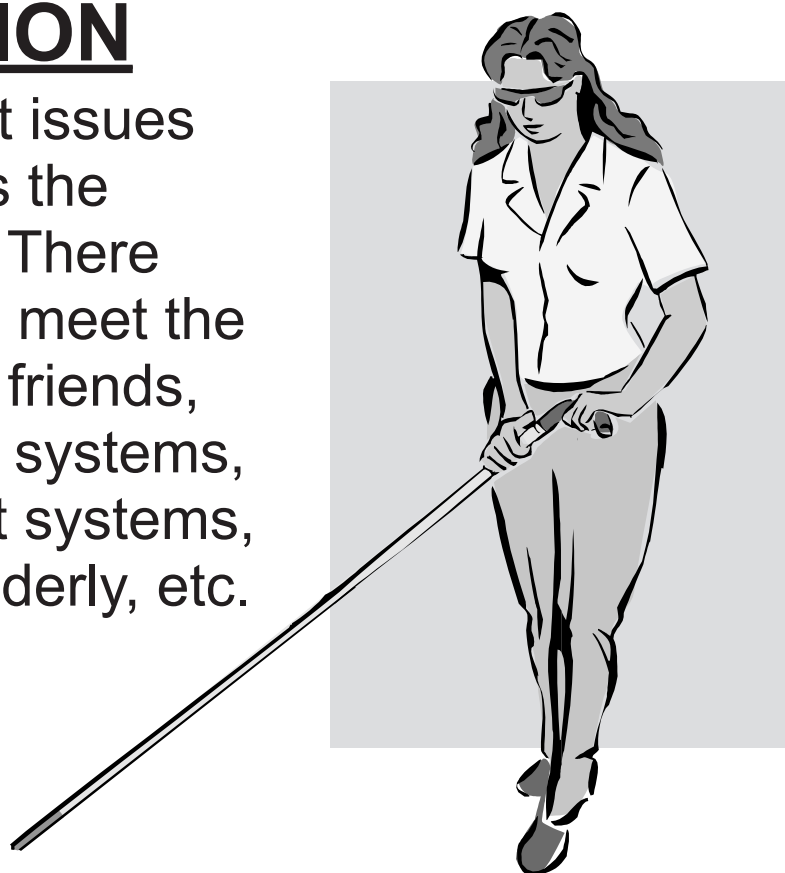
Does this mean that you can't look at what you do after you have learned an alternative technique using the sleep shade? Of course not! You should use what vision you have. Over time, you will learn to use your vision and the non-visual techniques together. Then, it will not matter if you are having a good or bad vision day. You will still be able to do what you want.

Many people have traveled this road that you are on. It is not easy, as you know. The good news is you can be as independent as you choose to be, in spite of your sight loss. You can go to work or continue living independently in your community. The choice is yours.

TRAVEL & TRANSPORTATION

COMMUNITY TRANSPORTATION

One of the most difficult issues faced by blind people is the issue of transportation. There are a variety of ways to meet the need: family members, friends, paid drivers, public bus systems, curb-to-curb paratransit systems, transportation for the elderly, etc.



ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY

Orientation and mobility is related to the ability of people who are blind or severely visually impaired to know where they are in space, how to find their way to a destination and how to move safely and comfortably. Orientation and mobility is taught by certified Orientation and Mobility Instructors or Orientation and Mobility Specialists.

Orientation and Mobility training consists of white cane training, protective techniques, sighted guide training and other techniques. This booklet contains basic information about protective techniques and sighted guide techniques that may assist you. More extensive information should be obtained from an Orientation and Mobility Instructor or Specialist.

PROTECTIVE TECHNIQUES

Protective Techniques refer to the use of your hands and arms to provide protection when walking in a familiar area such as your home without a cane. Below are descriptions of some simple techniques that may help you travel safely inside your home.

- **Trailing:** Travel next to walls by extending the arm, with your hand leading, next to the wall in front of your body. Use the back of your hand – pinkie and ring fingers – and keep fingers relaxed. Curve your fingers and thumb in and down (to avoid jamming your fingers). By keeping your arm extended and your hand in front while you walk you will find things in your path with your hand or arm for advanced warning of obstacles.
- **Upper Body Protection:** With your dominant hand touch opposite shoulder with finger tips and rotate your forearm and wrist so that your palm is facing outward. Bring your arm out from your body to an angle and move your elbow down slightly so your hand & forearm are in front of your face. This technique protects your head and shoulders area. Use this technique when walking down hallways, around doorways, etc. to protect your head from open doors and protruding items. This can also be used in addition to your cane to protect your head from tree branches.
- **Lower Body Protection:** With your dominant hand touch the opposite thigh

with finger tips and rotate your forearm and wrist so that your palm is facing outward. Then move your hand out in front of the lower section of your body. Shift your hand toward the center of your body. Use this technique when walking in areas with low items, like a kitchen with counter tops.

DROPPED OBJECT

To find an object you've dropped, listen to where the object lands. Then, pivot your body toward the object. Go toward the object but don't underestimate the distance. Bend down (using a wall or stable object for balance) or get down on your hands and knees, using your upper body protective techniques to protect your head. Use your free hand (the one that's not protecting your head) to search — palms down — with a very light sweeping motion. Use “rainbows” starting near your feet and develop broader “rainbows” to sweep a larger surface. Move backward or forward if your first search doesn't work. Remember to continue to protect your head.

ORIENTATION TIPS

- Listed below are various tips that may assist you if you are having difficulty identifying where you are in your home.
- Listen for normal sounds in your home to assist you in identifying your location. For example, the sound of the refrigerator, air conditioning or heating unit, etc.
- Place a radio in the area that you have trouble identifying and keep the radio on with the sound turned low.
- Arrange your furniture to allow for clear walkways and remove any throw rugs that may be a trip hazard.
- Keep all doors open or shut (whichever is your preference) to prevent injuries from partially open doors. Be sure to instruct your family members to keep them open or shut but never leave partially open.
- Be aware of smells related to your environment. For example, a bowl of potpourri in your bedroom or food cooking in the kitchen. These can give clues to where you are in your home.

Guiding Techniques

Using Guiding Techniques is one way for a blind or low vision person to travel in new, unfamiliar environments. Some of the more common techniques are featured on the next page.

It's important to note that the visually impaired person ("customer" in the instructions) holds above the elbow of the sighted person and walks one step behind in order to anticipate movements of the sighted person.

For further instruction on the use of Guiding Techniques please contact your local TWS-VRS office, which can also assist in arranging for more in depth Orientation & Mobility training in the use of a white cane.

BRIGHT IDEA!

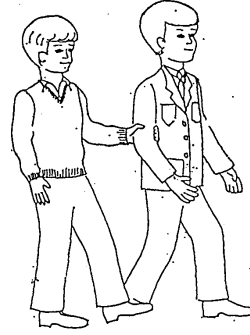


Friends and family members who are sighted may wish to travel under blindfold using a sighted guide as a way to have an experience similar to their blind loved one's.

GUIDING TECHNIQUES

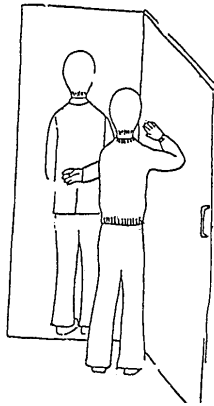


Allow the customer to grasp your elbow with his/her fingers near your body with his/her thumb on the opposite side.



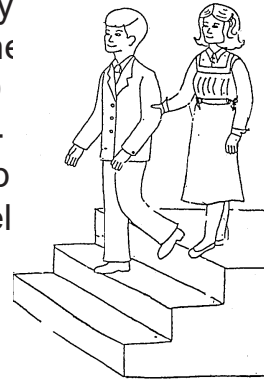
The customer walks about one-half step and slightly behind the sighted guide with opposite shoulders parallel. Walk along at a regular pace.

When approaching a door, tell the customer if it pushes or pulls, right or left. The customer may choose to touch the door, in which case the guide steps behind.



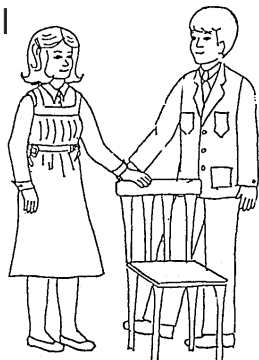
Pause at the beginning of the stairway. The customer walks one step behind the guide.

Customer may want to use the hand rail AND the guide's elbow. Going up stairs may feel more comfortable than going down.

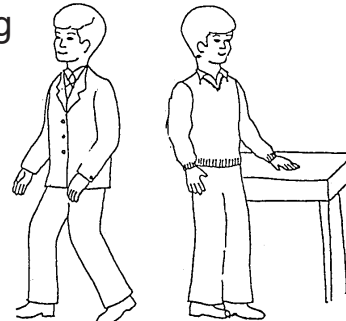


When seating a customer, describe the chair and put his or her hand in touch with the chair's back or arm.

The customer will need to clear the seat with his/her free hand before sitting down.



When leaving a customer, always put him/her in contact with some object (table, chair, wall, etc.). Being left in the middle of a room can be disorienting.



COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When a person experiences vision loss many communication skills have to be adapted to compensate. Routine things like using the telephone, telling time or writing your signature on a document are important elements of everyday communication. Yet even these seemingly simple tasks can be daunting to a blind person who has not developed the skills to do them. This section includes information about learning new skills to modify how you handle a variety of communication issues.

USING THE TELEPHONE

Dialing a telephone can be accomplished non-visually by learning and memorizing the positions of the numbers on the telephone keypad. Most push button telephones have



a small raised mark on the number “5” that will assist in orienting you to the keypad. From top to bottom the first row contains the numbers 1,2,3; the second row contains

numbers 4,5,6; the third row contains numbers 7,8,9; and the fourth row contains the * key, 0 and the # key. By placing your index, middle, and ring fingers on the second row (use the raised mark on the 5 to find the second row) you can easily move your fingers to the rows above and below to dial the number. Practice this skill until you become confident. In addition to the non-visual techniques above you can purchase a large button telephone from specialty catalogs, Wal-Mart and other stores.

ORGANIZING PHONE NUMBERS

- Enlarge personal phone books, business cards, etc. on a copy machine and organize them in a binder.
- Write phone numbers on index cards with a black felt-tip marker and store them in a basket, shoe box or with a

**BRIGHT
IDEA!**



DIRECTORY ASSISTANCE EXEMPTION

Local telephone companies provide free directory assistance (1411) for visually impaired individuals that are unable to use the telephone book. Contact your local and long distance carrier for information and application.

rubber band.

- Write phone numbers in large print with a black marker on plain white typing paper. Put one phone number per page and keep in a binder or staple together.
- Record phone numbers using a digital recorder and create folders for family, friends, and businesses.
- Use Braille to make a phone book or index cards.

READING AND WRITING

Reading and writing are also things that will take adjustments when you lose your vision. Below you will find ideas for adapting writing materials, reading your mail, and paying your bills. Additionally you will find information about Braille and the ways that it can benefit you.

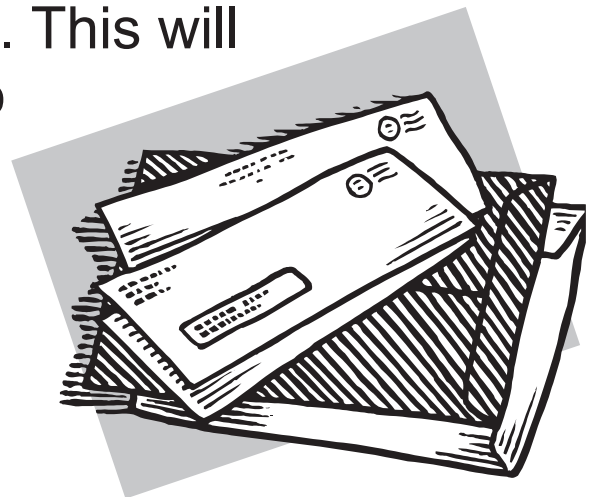
ADAPTING WRITING MATERIALS

- Use any type of black felt tip pen (20/20, Sharpie, Marks a Lot, etc.) when writing in large print on white paper.
- Create bold line paper by drawing lines with a felt tip pen and straight edge on white paper. Bold line paper can also be purchased from specialty catalogs.

- Use a straight edge such as a ruler or a side of a credit card or ID card as a guide in signing name, addressing envelopes, writing notes, etc.
- Writing guides for letters, checks, envelopes, and signing documents are also available from specialty catalogs.

READING MAIL

- Ask your bank for a large print or Braille monthly account statement.
- Ask your utility companies to send large print or Braille monthly statements.
- Ask a family member or friend to assist with reading your mail or hire a reader. Some community agencies have volunteer bill payers and many churches also provide volunteers.
- Sort mail into categories of bills, junk mail, letters, etc. when it is received. Shoe boxes make good containers. This will assist you and your reader to use time more wisely.
- Use a magnifier or CCTV to read small items and save larger items for your reader.



BRIGHT IDEA!



BRAILLE

Braille is a tactile reading and writing system used by blind and low vision people. The letters of the alphabet, numbers, punctuation and words are formed by combinations of Braille cells. A Braille cell consists of two vertical rows of three raised dots and looks similar to a six on a domino. **Uncontracted Braille** includes the alphabet, numbers, punctuation and composition signs that are special to Braille. **Contracted Braille** adds 189 contractions and short form words and eliminates the need to spell out each word therefore saving space and paper.

Braille is a valuable tool you can use to label and mark items in your home, organize phone numbers, read and write notes and grocery lists, read books and magazines, adapt board and card games, tell time and the list goes on. You are never too old to learn and use Braille.

The Hadley School for the Blind also offers a free correspondence course to learn Braille. For more information contact the Hadley School for the Blind at 1-800-526-9909 or visit their website: www.hadley-school.org.

PAYING BILLS

- Keep track of billing dates on a calendar so you know when to expect bills.
- Call customer service lines if you are unable to read the bill to inquire about your amount due and due date.
- Enlarge check register to a full sheet of paper by using a copy machine and keep in a binder.
- Large Print check registers can also be ordered from specialty catalogs.
- Talk with utility and other companies about options for direct draft of bills from your bank account.
- Ask your bank for large print or raised line checks.
- Check writing guides can be purchased from specialty catalogs.
- Purchase a talking calculator for use in balancing your checkbook.
- You may also use a CCTV to write checks.
- Many Area Agencies on Aging and community agencies have volunteer bill payer programs.

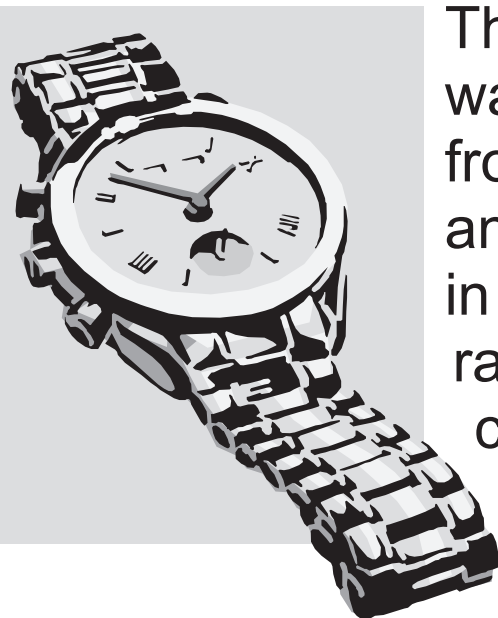
BRIGHT IDEA!



ELECTRONIC BANKING

A growing number of banks and businesses offer electronic banking services (such as direct deposit and electronic fund transfers) as a secure and expedient alternatives to traditional banking. It's a convenience that can also save time and money by reducing or eliminating trips to the bank, postage, checks and envelopes. In addition, many banks offer online bank statements and other features you may find useful in managing your finances, right at your computer! Contact your bank for more information.

TELLING TIME



There are a variety of clocks and watches that can be purchased from specialty catalogs, Wal-Mart, and other local stores to assist you in telling time. The items available range from Braille watches and clocks, talking watches and clocks as well as Low Vision watch and clocks with large print numbers.

KEEPING A CALENDAR

Keeping track of dates and appointments can be accomplished with Braille or low vision calendars. Both can be purchased through specialty catalogs and desktop size calendars available at office supply stores can work well as Low Vision Calendars.

BOOKS, NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

This section lists a variety of resources for Braille, large print, audio books, religious materials, music, magazines, newsletters and descriptive videotapes. Contact each resource for complete information about their services or products. The Texas State Library's Talking Book Program lends print materials in Braille, large print and audio cassette to blind and visually impaired people. The library also loans four-track cassette players for use with books on tape. (NOTE: You can download a copy of the application for this service from the



Texas State Library website:
www.tsl.state.tx.us/tbp/application. Or, call toll-free—800-252-9605—to request one.) Your local library is another resource for large print books, audio cassettes, speech output reading equipment or Internet access.

READING RESOURCES

American Printing House: Free taped or Braille magazine subscriptions to Reader's Digest and/or Newsweek
Phone: 800-223-1839
www.aph.org

Aurora Ministries' Bible Alliance: Free Bibles and Bible study on audiocassette in many languages
Phone: 941-748-3031
www.gospelcom.net
www.auroraminstries.org

Book Share: Members with visual impairments can listen to books using a text to speech synthesized voice using a computer or an approved device www.bookshare.org

Braille Bible Foundation: Free Braille and large print bibles
Phone: 407-834-3628

Dialogue Magazine: Subscription (donation)
Phone: 800-860-4224
www.blindskills.com

Directory Assistance Exemption: Free directory assistance (1411) for people with vision impairments who are unable to use the telephone book. Contact your local and long distance carriers for information/application.

Guidepost Magazine: Large print magazine (subscription required)
Phone: 800-431-2344
www.guideposts.org

Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired: Free correspondence courses for the blind, visually impaired and families. Courses available in academic subjects, independent living, recreation topics and Braille reading and writing. Call for catalog/application.

Phone: 800-323-4238

www.hadley-school.org

Hal Leonard Publishing Corp.: Sheet music in large print. Write for a catalog. 8112 W. Bluemond Rd, Milwaukee, WI 53213

www.halleonard.com

Hansen House: Sheet music in large print. Call or write for a catalog or to purchase 1870 West Ave., Miami Beach, FL 33139
Phone: 800-327-8202

International Association of Audio Information Services: Maintains a list of local radio reading services (newspapers, magazines and other print material over the radio).

Phone: 800-280-5325

www.iaais.org

Jewish Braille Institute of America: Free large print Torah. Call or write to request.
110 East 30th, New York, NY 10016
Phone: 212-889-2525
www.jewishbraille.org

Lutheran Braille Workers, Inc.: Free Braille Bibles and extra-large print Bibles (paperback or multi-volumes). Also offers devotional literature.
Phone: 905-795 8977
www.lbwinc.org

National Association for the Visually Handicapped: Produces newsletter (Seeing Clearly), resources for large print books and large print games. Call or write.
3201 Balboa St., San Francisco, CA 94121
Phone: 415-221-3201
www.navh.org

National Federation for the Blind,
National Newsline: Newspapers read over
the phone. Call or write.

1800 Johnson Street,

Baltimore, Maryland 21230

Phone: 410-659-9314 or 512-323-5444 or
713-956-1735

www.nfbtexas.org

Email: newsline@nfb-texas.org

**National Library for Blind and Physically
Handicapped:** Sheet music available in
large print. Call or write. (Note: The librarian
at the Texas State Library can assist in
obtaining.)

Library of Congress, Washington, DC 20504

Phone: 800-252-9605

www.loc.gov/nls

New York Times Weekly Newspaper: Paid
subscription for large print newspaper

Phone: 800-334-5497

www.nytimes.com

Reader's Digest Large Print Edition:

Available with subscription. Bible and
condensed books are also available

Phone: 800-877-5293 or 800-310-6261

Sharing Solutions Newsletter: Free large print newsletter published by Lighthouse International

Phone: 800-829-0500

www.lighthouse.org

Texas State Library Talking Books

Program: Lending library of audiotape, large print and Braille books. Four track cassette players are available on loan.

Phone: 800-252-9605 website

www.tsl.state.tx.us/tpb

Time Magazine: Large print edition available at subscription rate.

PO Box 61141 Tampa, FL 33661-1141

www.time.com

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

Assistive Technology is any item, piece of equipment or product system — whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified or customized — used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of people with disabilities.

Assistive Technology is used every day by people who are blind. It can be something as simple as marking an appliance with raised dots to something more high tech like a speech synthesizer computer program.

The following are descriptions of just some of the high tech devices available for people who are blind or visually impaired.

- **Screen Readers Software:** Computer software that allows blind and low vision computer users the ability to read their computer display with synthesized speech output. There are a variety of programs available including: JAWS, NVDA, Window Eyes, Supernova and System Access. The screen reading software offer a trial version that allows temporary use of the software. You can visit the website to download the software or call to inquire if a trail version

CD can be mailed. The cost for screen readers can vary from a few hundred to a thousand dollars. A few other screen readers are free or only require a small donation.

The following are screen readers that can be purchased:

JAWS by Freedom Scientific
Phone: 727-803-8600 Technical Support
www.freedomscientific.com

SuperNova by Dolphin Computer
Phone: 866-797-5921
www.yourdolphin.com

System Access by Serotek
Phone: 650-249-1000
www.serotek.com

Window Eyes by GW Micro
Phone: 260-489-3671
www.gwmicro.com

The following are free (or small donation) screen readers. Since it is not a paid program the only technical support are help files.

NVDA by NV Access
www.nvaaccess.org

SA to Go by Serotek
www.satogo.com

- **Refreshable Braille Display:** Device used with your computer that transforms screen information into refreshable Braille.
- **Screen Magnification Software:** Provides magnification levels of the computer screen from 2 to 16 times the normal view. It also provides auditory feedback that enables low vision users to hear as well as view text, graphics, applications, and menus. There are a variety of programs available including: ZoomText, Big Shot, Magic, and Supernova. The Screen Magnification software offer a trail version that allows temporary use of the software. You can visit the website to download the software

or call to inquire if a trail version CD can be mailed.

The following are screen magnification software that can be purchased:

Big Shot and Zoomtext by AiSquared – www.aisquared.com

Magic by Freedom Scientific – www.freedomscientific.com

Supernova (magnification) by Dolphin – www.yourdolphin.com

- **Notetakers:** A device used by low vision and blind users to take notes with either a standard keyboard or a Braille keyboard. Users are able to write, review, edit, and store information using speech or refreshable Braille outputs. Some notetakers offer an address book feature and an e-mail option.
- **Video Magnifiers (Closed Circuit Televisions/CCTV):** CCTV's assist individuals with low vision to read letters, address books, bills, and to write checks. CCTV's can either be used with your regular television screen, on a small, lightweight, portable screen or can be a complete system with a monitor and stand combined.

- **Reading Machines/Software:** Blind and low vision users can read text or electronic documents with either a reading machine or reading machine software. There are machines for non-computer users as well as computer users.
- **Digital Book Players:** Digital book players are designed for the visually impaired to record notes, play music and listen to books. The players can be operated without using vision and some can play all of the following content: Texas State Library's Talking Books, Book Share and NFB Newsline. A web search can list more information about the Victor Reader Stream, BookSense and PLEXTALK Pocket. You may also call your local TWS-VRS office to learn where one of these devices may be purchased.
- **Tablets:** Tablets offer magnification or speech for the visually impaired. The Ipad and Google Nexus Seven are examples of Tablets that offer accessibility to the visually impaired. Tablets with accessibility features can provide access to Texas State Library's Talking Books, Book Share and NFB Newsline; they can

also provide mainstream access to other books such as Audible, Apple AppStore or Google Play.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY FINANCIAL AID

Many times the cost for assistive technology is outside of an individual's budget. There are two resources for low cost loans or assistance for purchasing the items. For more information, contact your local TWS-VRS office or visit one of the entities listed below.

- **Computers for the Blind**
1201 S. Sherman Street, Suite 204
Richardson, TX 75081
Phone Customer Service: 214-340-6328
www.computersfortheblind.net
Fax: 214-452-0565
Email questions and purchase orders to:
Info@computersfortheblind.net
- **Association of Blind Citizens Assistive Technology Fund**
www.blindcitizens.org/assistive_tech.htm
Email: atf@blindcitizens.org

The Assistive Technology Fund provides funds to cover fifty percent of the retail price of adaptive devices or software, including digital audio book players. The products covered by this program must retail for a minimum of \$200 and a maximum retail price of \$6,000. Persons eligible to apply for assistance must have a family income of less than \$50,000 and cash assets of less than \$20,000. The organization features two grant periods per year: June and December 31st. Use the form on the website to apply.

Assistive Technology Websites

The following links are intended as starting points. This is not an inclusive list of companies selling assistive technology or websites for information about assistive technology. The Vocational Rehabilitation division or TWC does not endorse a particular company.



- ***www.AiSquared.com***: A ZoomText product demo you can download.
- ***www.gwmicro.com***: A Window Eyes product demo you can download.

- **www.freedomscientific.com**: JAWS & Magic product demos you can download.
- **www.telesensory.com**: Various CCTV and low vision products.
- **www.dolphinuk.co.uk/downloads/index.asp, www.dolphinusa.com**: Product demo downloads for Hal, Supernova and Lunar screen reader products.
- **www.abledata.com**: A large listing of blindness and low vision resources including product listings and evaluations.
- **www.humanware.com**: This company offers a variety of assistive technology devices.

ORGANIZATIONS FOR THE BLIND & SUPPORT GROUPS

Nobody understands vision loss better than someone who has personal experience with it. People who are adjusting to vision loss often benefit from associating with others who understand the range issues, concerns and challenges. Texas is home to a number of outstanding organizations that support people who are blind or have vision impairments. The three major groups are included in this section. Contact them for more information about their respective services, supports and membership requirements. They will also be able to provide information about community organizations and resources.

AMERICAN COUNCIL OF THE BLIND OF TEXAS

The American Council of the Blind of Texas, Inc. (ACBT) is an affiliate of The American Council of the Blind. ACBT represents the interests of blind and visually impaired Texans and strives to increase the independence, security, equality of opportunity and quality of life for all blind and visually impaired people. Though the majority of members are blind or visually impaired, sighted persons who share the common goals of ACBT are welcome to join. ACBT currently has nine chapters and six special interest affiliates.

ACBT Contact:

President

Kenneth Semien, Sr.

Phone: 409-866-5838

www.acbtexas.org

E-mail: semien@sbcglobal.net

Local Chapter: Beaumont Area Council -
Beaumont, TX

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF TEXAS

The National Federation of the Blind of Texas is Texas' largest organization of blind people, with hundreds of members living in every part of the state. NFB of Texas promotes the complete and equal integration of blind people into society, working to remove legal, economic and social discrimination; advance public education about blindness and promote the right of all blind people to exercise to the fullest their individual talents and capacities.

NFB of Texas Contact:

National Federation of the Blind of Texas

314 E. Highland Mall Blvd. Ste. 253

Austin, TX 78752

Phone: 512-323-5444

www.nfb-texas.org

Fax: 512-420-8160

Email: president@nfbtx.org

AMERICAN FOUNDATION FOR THE BLIND

The American Foundation for the Blind is a national nonprofit organization promoting advocacy for people who are blind or visually impaired in areas of employment, independent living, literacy, and technology.

AFB Headquarters Contact:

2 Penn Plaza, Suite 1102

New York, NY 10121

Phone: 212-502-7600

www.afb.org

Fax: 888-545-8331

AFB Center on Vision Loss

11030 Ables Lane

Dallas, TX 75229

Phone: 214-352-7222

www.afb.org

Fax: (646) 478-9260

E-mail: dallas@afb.net

QUALITY OF LIFE

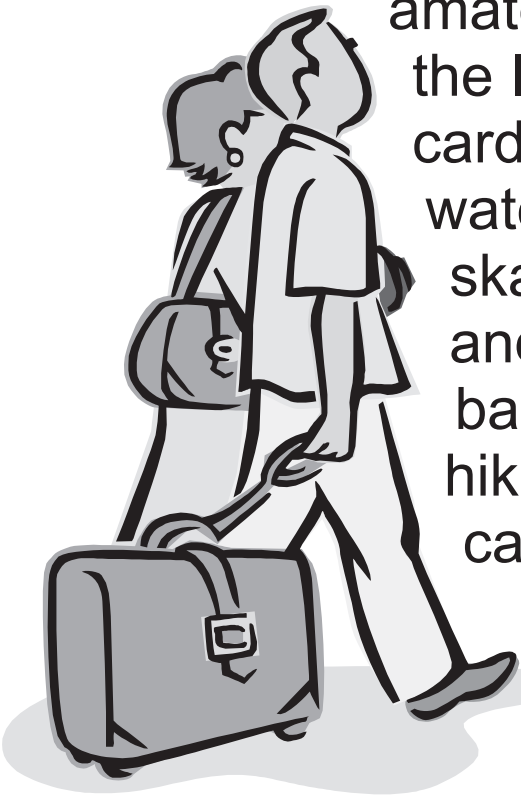
RECREATION

Recreation can be anything from reading a book, to bowling, to mountain climbing.

Losing your vision should not limit you in participating in the activities that you enjoy. Blind and visually impaired people are involved in arts and crafts,

amateur radio, Bingo, computers, the Internet, woodworking, playing cards, wrestling, weight lifting, judo, water skiing, cross country skiing, skating, swimming, fishing, track and field, bowling, basketball, baseball, volleyball, billiards, biking, hiking, mountain climbing, sailing, camping, golf, scuba diving, wind surfing, horseback riding and many more activities. The

following resources will serve as starting points to explore associations, clubs and companies than will help you pursue activities you enjoy.



Travel

- **Access-Able Travel Source** (website with various resources for travel tours, travel agents, etc. for people with disabilities)
www.access-able.com
- **Minds Eye Travel** (travel packages for visually impaired)
4 Bonnie Brae, Camden, ME 04843
Phone: 207-542-4438
www.mindseyetravel.com
Email: info@mindseyetravel.com
- **Traveleyes** (has international travel tours for visually impaired)
PO Box 511, Leeds. LS5 3JT, UK
Phone: 646-867 3937
www.traveleyes-international.com

COMPUTER & BOARD GAMES

- **Accessible Computer Games**
www.gamesfortheblind.com
- **American Printing House for the Blind**
1839 Frankfort,
PO Box 6085, Louisville, KY 40206
Phone: 800-223-1839
www.aph.org

SPORTS

- **American Blind Bowling Association**
www.abba1951.org
- **American Blind Skiing Foundation**
609 Crandell Lane, Schaumburg, IL
60193
Phone: 312-409-1605
www.absf.org
Email: ABSF@absf.org
- **Blind Golf**— *www.blindgolf.com*
- **United States Blind Golf Association**
www.usblindgolf.com
Email: info@usblindgolf.com
- **Foresight Ski Guides, Inc.**
PO Box 18944, Denver, CO 80218-0944
Phone: 866-860-0972
www.foresightskiguide.org
Email: foresightskiing@aol.com
- **National Beep Baseball Association**
www.nbba.org
Email: info@nbba.org

- **Ski For Light (Cross Country)**
1455 West Lake St., Minneapolis, MN
55408
Phone: 612-827-3232
www.sfl.org
Email: info@sfl.org
- **USA Water Ski**
1251 Holy Cow Rd., Polk City, FL 33868
Phone: 863-324-4341
www.waterski.org
Fax: 863-325-8259

AMATEUR RADIO

- **Handi Ham**
3915 Golden Valley Rd, Golden Valley,
MN 55422
Phone: 866-426-3442
www.handiham.org



MUSIC, VIDEOS, AND THEATRE

See the *Reading Resources List in the Communication Section* of this booklet for a listing of descriptive videos and places to purchase sheet music.

- **Music by Ear** (music instruction in an audio format)
704 Habersham Rd, Valdosta, GA 31602
Phone: 229-249-0628
www.musicvi.com
- **Access Austin Arts, Inc., Austin, TX**
(Audio description for live performances)
Phone: 512-499-0255

RECREATIONAL EQUIPMENT RESOURCES

See the adaptive aids catalogs listing in this section.

- **BSN Sports**
P.O. Box 7726, Dallas, TX 75209
Phone: 800-527-7510
www.bsnsports.com

- **Hammat Senior Products**
P.O. Box 727, Mount Vernon, WA 98273
Phone: 206- 428-5850
- **Howe Press, Perkins School for the Blind**
175 No. Beacon Street, Watertown, MA,
02172-9982
Phone: 617-924-3490
www.perkins.org
- **Picket Enterprises** (supplies for activity professionals)
PO Box 640, Scottsdale, AZ 85252
Phone: 800-500-5641
www.pickettenterprises.com
Email: support@pickettenterprises.com
- **Rousettus** (yoga mats for visually impaired)
Phone: 866-990-8496; rousettus.com
- **US Games**
PO Box 117028, Carrollton, TX 75011-7028
Phone: 800-327-0484
www.usgames.com

- **Wolverine Sports**
745 State Circle, Box 1941, Ann Arbor, MI
48106
Phone: 800-521-2832
www.wolverinesports.com

ADAPTIVE AID CATALOGS

You can purchase a variety of adaptive aids to assist in adjusting to vision loss including talking watches/clocks, large number clocks, 20/20 pens, writing guides, bold line paper, low vision playing cards, braille playing cards, raised dot dominos, white canes, etc. The following list of catalogues and stores will help you get started. It's not an inclusive list and TWS-VRS doesn't endorse any particular company. Check your local phone book for similar businesses in your area.

Harris Communications

Phone: 800-825-6758
www.harriscomm.com

Hear More

Phone: 800-881-4327
www.hearmore.com

Independent Living Aids

Phone: 800-537-2118

www.independentliving.com

Innovative Rehabilitation Technology, Inc.

Phone: 800-322-4784

www.irti.net

L S & S Group

Phone: 800-468-4789

www.lssproducts.com

Lighthouse International

Phone: 800-284-4422

www.lighthouse.org/

Maxi Aids

Phone: 800-522-6294

www.maxiaids.com

See-More Vision Aiding Products

Phone: 800-428-6673

www.seemorevision.com

Speak to Me Catalog

Phone: 800-248-9965

**BRIGHT
IDEA!**



Don't overlook
stores like
Amazon and
Wal-Mart in your
search for aids to
assist with every
day tasks!

SELF-ADVOCACY SKILLS

- Be patient, consistent and persistent.
- Contact someone with the organization or company as soon as you notice a problem with the service or goods.
- Be as concise as possible. Explain the problem and how you would like to see it resolved.
- Make a note of the day you called and who you talked to. Follow up with the contact with a note or letter if possible. Ask that any comments or actions to solve the issue be put in writing to you.
- Make follow up contacts until the issue is resolved. If the person you talk to cannot assist you then go to his/her superior. Document all contacts and who you talked to.
- If attempts with the organization or company fail to resolve your issue contact the organization or agency in your area that governs them. Depending on the situation this might be the Better Business Bureau, a city council member, county commissioner, agency or statewide hotline, Advocacy, Inc., your legislator, etc.
- If it is a legal matter you can call the Legal Hotline for Older Texans at 1-800-622-

2520. They can give you information on your legal rights and how you can pursue legal matters.

- If needed enlist the help of a friend or family member. If you are having trouble finding out what agency may govern an organization you can contact your local library. The librarians will be able to assist you in looking for the information.

Support and Assistance

Even the most independent people need some assistance now and then. How much and what kind of assistance might be useful to you depends entirely on your individual circumstances. Here are some tips for deciding if you need assistance, who might provide it and where you might find them:

- Think about what type of assistance you need. You may want to make a list of specific activities that someone could help you with, as well as any particular skills or attributes needed. For example, if you need a ride somewhere, you need someone who can drive and has access to a car.
- Think of people you already know who might help. Friends and relatives are

often more than happy to help with an errand or task.

- Aside from friends and family, there are volunteers and organizations that may be able to help. Search the phone book's yellow pages and/or the Internet. Put an ad on the bulletin board at your office, school or church. Contact a local high school or college to ask about trustworthy students willing to do odd jobs to make a little extra money. Ask your friends and associates who they employed for a particular job.
- Before you hire a helper, get references BEFORE you select him/her and follow up by calling the references. Remember, you're entrusting your personal safety and property to someone you don't know. It's important to verify that they are reliable, trustworthy and can do the job you need done, whether it's driving, yard work, house cleaning, roofing, etc.
- If a person/organization you're considering hiring claims to be licensed, ask for verification of the license. Contact the board or agency that awards the license to check out credentials and whether any complaints have been filed.

BRIGHT IDEA!



GET INVOLVED

- ✓ Volunteer at a local hospital, school, nonprofit organization, AARP, etc.
- ✓ Join an organization, club or lodge in your community that interests you like the AARP, Rotary Club, Lions Club, Toastmasters, etc.
- ✓ Start or join a support group or club for other blind or visually impaired people in your community. See the support group list in the back of this book and read the Support Systems section of this book.
- ✓ Join the Silver Haired Legislature that is sponsored by local Area Agencies on Aging.
- ✓ Vote.
- ✓ Visit or write to your state or national representatives.
- ✓ Join your neighborhood association.
- ✓ Join a health club or local YMCA
- ✓ Invite friends or family over to play games or have dinner.
- ✓ Attend your local senior citizens center for lunch and activities.
- ✓ Enroll for continuing education courses at your local community college.
- ✓ Volunteer to serve on boards of local organizations that are important to you

BRIGHT IDEA!



BE PROACTIVE!

Take the time to protect yourself and your finances in any way that you can by asking questions and checking references of people you hire to assist you. Better safe than sorry!

Independent Living Resources

**Texas Association of Centers for
Independent Living c/o CBCIL**
1537 Seventh Street
Corpus Christi, TX 78404
Phone: 361-883-8461
Toll Free: 877-988-1999
Email: judyt@acicbcil.org
www.acicbcil.org

Texas State Independent Living Council
4319 James Casey St, Suite 100
Austin, TX 78745
Phone: 512 371 7353
www.txsilc.org

**TEXAS CENTERS FOR
INDEPENDENT LIVING
ABLE Center for Independent Living
(ABLE CIL)**

1931 East 37th, Suite 1

Odessa, TX 79762

Phone: 432-580-3439

Fax: 432-580-0280

www.ablecenterpb.org

**Austin Resource Center for Independent
Living (ARCIL)**

825 E. Rundberg, Suite # E6

Austin, TX 78753

Voice/TTY: 512-832-6349

Fax: 512-832-1869

Email: arcil@arcil.com

www.arcil.com

ARCIL San Marcos (ARCIL Satellite)

618 S. Guadalupe, #103

San Marcos, TX 78666

Voice/TTY: 512-396-5790

Fax: 512-396-5794

Email: sanmarcos@arcil.com,

www.arcil.com/sm.html

ARCIL Round Rock

(ARCIL Satellite)

525 Round Rock West, Suite A120

Round Rock, TX 78681

Phone: 512-828-4624

Fax: 512-828-4625

www.arcil.com

Coalition for Barrier Free Living/Brazoria County CIL (BCCIL)

1104 D East Mulberry

Angleton, TX 77515

Voice/TTY: 979-849-7060

Fax: 979-849-8465

www.hcil.cc/locations/bccil

Coalition for Barrier Free Living/Fort Bend CIL (FBCIL)

12946 Dairy Ashford Road, Suite 110

Sugar Land, TX 77478

Voice/TTY: 281-980-2219

Fax: 281-980-2298

www.hcil.cc/locations/fbcil

**Coalition for Barrier Free Living/Houston
CIL (HCIL)**

Corporate Office

6201 Bonhomme Road, Suite 150-S

Houston, TX 77036

Voice/TTY: 713-974-4621

TTY Direct: 713-974-2703

Fax: 713-974-6927

www.hcil.cc

**Coastal Bend Center for Independent
Living**

1537 Seventh Street

Corpus Christi, TX 78404

Voice/TDD: 361-883-8461

Fax: 361-883-4820

www.cbcil.org

**Crockett Resource Center for
Independent Living**

1020 E. Loop 304

Crockett, TX 75835

Voice/TDD: 936-544-2811

Toll Free: 800-784-8710

Fax: 936-544-7315

www.crockettresourcecenter.org

Disability Connections (LRDC)

2809 Southwest Blvd.
San Angelo, TX 76904
Phone: 325-227-6624
Fax: 325-227-6632
www.dcciltx.org

Disability in Action (DiA)

3305 North 3rd, Suite 320
Abilene, TX 79603
Phone: 325-672-5460
Fax: 325-672-2903
www.disabilityinaction.org

East Texas Center for Independent Living

4713 Troup Highway
Tyler, TX 75703
Voice: 903-581-7542
Fax: 903-581-8289
www.etcil.org

Heart of Central Texas Independent Living (HOCTIL)

222 East Central or P.O. Box 636

Belton, TX 76513

Phone: 254-933-7487

Toll Free: 1-800-326-4921

Fax: 254-933-7466

www.hoctlc.org

LIFE, Inc. (LIFE/RUN)

8240 Boston Ave.

Lubbock, TX 79423

Phone: 806-795-5433

Fax: 806-795-5607

www.liferun.org

Mounting Horizons (MHCIL)

4700 Broadway, Suite E-100

Galveston, TX 77551

Phone: 409-356-4809

Toll Free: 888-307-9639

Fax: 713-422-2546

www.mhcil.org

Palestine Resource Center (PRCIL)

421 Avenue A

Palestine, TX 75801

Phone: 903-729-7505

Toll Free: 1-888-326-5166

Fax: 903-729-7540

www.palestineresourcecenter.org

Panhandle Independent Living Center (PILC)

417 West 10th Ave.

Amarillo, TX 79101

Phone: 806-374-1400

Phone: TTY 806-374-2774

Fax: 806-374-4550

www.panhandleilc.org

Rehabilitation, Education & Advocacy for Citizens with Handicaps (REACH)

8625 King George Dr., #210

Dallas, TX 75235-2275

Voice: 214-630-4796

TDD: 214-630-5995

Email: reachdallas@reachcils.org

www.reachcils.org

**REACH of Fort Worth Resource CIL
(REACH-Ft. Worth)**

1000 Macon Street, Suite 200

Fort Worth, TX 76102-4527

Phone: 817-870-9082

Fax: 817-877-1622

www.reachcils.org/locations/fort-worth

REACH—Denton

404 South Elm, # 202

Denton, TX 76201-6066

Voice/TDD: 940-383-1062

Email: reachden@reachcils.org

www.reachcils.org

**REACH of Plano Resource CIL (REACH-
Plano)**

720 East Park Blvd., Suite 104

Plano, TX 75074-8844

Phone: 972-398-1111

Fax: 972-398-9649

www.reachcils.org/locations/plano

RISE - Resource, Information, Support & Empowerment

Cheryl Bass, Executive Director

755 South Eleventh Street #101

Beaumont, TX 77701

Voice/TTY: (409) 832-2599

Fax: (409) 838-4499

San Antonio Independent Living Services (SAILS)

1028 South Alamo

San Antonio, TX 78210

Phone: 210-281-1878

Fax: 210-281-1759

www.sailstx.org

Valley Association for Independent Living -Rio Grande Valley (VAIL-RGV)

3016 North McColl, Suite B

McAllen, TX 78501

Phone: 956-668-8245

Fax: 956-631-7914

www.vailrgv.org

**Valley Association for Independent
Living-South Texas (VAIL-ST)**

1419 Corpus Christi

Laredo, TX 78040

Phone: 456-523-1411

Fax: 956-428-4339

www.vailrgv.org

VOLAR Center for Independent Living

1220 Golden Key Circle

El Paso, TX 79925-5825

Voice/TDD: 915-591-0800

Email: lechew@volarcil.org

www.volarcil.org

**National Independent Living Re-
sources**

**Association of Programs for Rural
Independent Living (APRIL)**

11324 Arcade Drive Suite 9

Little Rock, AR 72212

Phone: 501-753-3400

Fax: 501-753-3406

www.april-rural.org

**National Council on Independent Living
(NCIL)**

www.ncil.org

**Independent Living Research Utilization
Network (ILRU)**

Email: rise@riseCIL.org

www.ilru.org

www.riseCIL.org

Independent Living USA (links to IL
centers nationwide)

www.ilusa.com

**U.S. Dept. of Education (DOE)
Rehabilitation Services Administration
(RSA)**

www.ed.gov

www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA

Your TWS-VRS Office

To locate your Texas Workforce Solutions-
Vocational Rehabilitation Services
(TWS-VRS) office, visit:
www.texasworkforce.org/find-locations



Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services

101 East 15th Street
Austin, TX 78778-0001
800-628-5115

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon
request to individuals with disabilities.

Relay Texas: 800-735-2989 (TTY) and 711 (Voice)

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