Low Vision

What is Low Vision?
Impaired vision, interfering with normal activities, not corrected by standard medical care or glasses.

At what level does low vision begin? When should vision rehabilitation be provided or the patient referred to low vision services?
The "Smart Sight" initiative of the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends considering anyone with visual acuity worse than 20/40 in the best eye as having low vision, especially if there is impaired contrast sensitivity, scotoma or field loss. Those who read a lot, use a computer often or have work or hobbies requiring fine vision may have symptoms earlier. Low vision care should be offered early, before the patient loses a job, hobbies, becomes dependent on others or depressed.

What can be done about low vision?
There are many resources, aids, devices and training available to help those who have low vision. These vary from simple improved lighting and mild magnification to audio devices, electronic magnification, orientation and mobility training, Braille special computer software and much more. More resources and devices are becoming available quickly as technology progresses.

The role of the Ophthalmologist in Low Vision Care
As the leader of the eye care team, the Ophthalmologist should assume leadership in the care of the visually impaired, and should understand the impact of low vision on the individual. The Vision Rehabilitation committee of the American academy of Ophthalmology urges ophthalmologists to look beyond disease to consider disability, and beyond eyes to consider lives.

What are some basic principles and pointers for the practicing Ophthalmologist?
To give your patient with acquired low vision the best chance of remaining functional and relatively happy:
- Recognize that vision impairment begins early for some patients, especially if there is central scotoma, field loss or contrast sensitivity loss. This is particularly true if the person reads a lot, has hobbies involving fine vision, is working or uses the computer.
• Provide low vision rehabilitation or refer to low vision services in your area. Do this early, before patients lose hobbies or job and become depressed or seek alternative care.
• Most patients who develop low vision are not aware of low vision care. The ophthalmologist should make all aware of the existence and potential of low vision rehabilitation.
• The ophthalmologist does not need to personally educate and refer. A designated nurse, ophthalmic technician or social worker may assume this role.
• If the condition is unlikely to cause total blindness (as, AMD), tell this to the patient. This may prevent much unnecessary worry and depression.
• Do not tell a low vision patient "There is nothing else that can be done". Say, "There is nothing else we should do at this time. Let us keep following you. Meanwhile, go to the low vision clinic and they will help you do things such as reading or whatever you need or want to do".
• May give patient material provided by the AAO. PDF 55K, Smart Sight Patient Materials, has much information for low vision patients. Go to AAO web site and enter "Smart Sight" or "PDF 55K" in the search box.

What do comprehensive Vision Rehabilitation Clinics provide?
• Functional vision evaluation- not just single letter Snellen acuity but also evaluation of reading, field loss, scotoma and contrast sensitivity, refraction with trial frame and loose lens and possibly others such as microperimetry.
• Evaluation of individual patient's goals, motivation and capabilities.
• Demonstration and provision of appropriate adaptive devices, aids and magnifiers as cost-efficiently as possible.
• Occupational therapy training and home visits
• Support groups and workshops in use of adaptive devices and software
• Counseling and family education regarding challenges of vision loss
• Referral to appropriate agencies and organizations such as state Vocational Rehabilitation services, the Veterans Administration, and others.

Ensure that the patient continues under regular medical care and returns promptly to Ophthalmologist if change in vision occurs.

For those interested in starting a Vision Rehabilitation program
• By logging in to AAO web site, may obtain Smart Sight Level 1 and 2, PDF 46K Materials for Physicians
• The AAO's "Preferred Practice Patterns: Vision Rehabilitation for Adults". The Vision Rehabilitation Committee is eager to help anyone interested in becoming involved in Vision Rehabilitation and mentoring is available at several centers.
• You may contact one or both of the two low vision medical clinics in Alabama, the UAB Low Vision Center in Birmingham or Community Services for Vision Rehabilitation (CSVR) in Mobile (see below for contact information).

Low Vision Services in Alabama

Low Vision Medical Clinics
There are 2 medical clinics providing low vision rehabilitation in Alabama

UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation
The UAB Center for Vision Rehabilitation at the UAB Ophthalmology Department in Birmingham is a comprehensive low vision rehabilitation center, offering initial evaluation by a low vision specialist, rehabilitation training by Occupational Therapists, a technology center and psychology services.
Contact:
Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital Suite 405
700 18th Street South
Birmingham, Alabama 35294-0009
Phone (205) 488-0736
Fax (205) 488-0746
LINK
http://medicine.uab.edu/eyedoc/lowvision/

Community Services for Vision Rehabilitation
CSV R is a comprehensive low vision rehabilitation clinic, offering initial evaluation by a low vision specialist (MD or OD), rehabilitation training by Occupational Therapists, a full inventory of adaptive technology support groups and computer workshops.
CONTACT:
CSV R has offices in Montgomery, Mobile and Daphne and may be contacted at:
Montgomery 1-334-782-3557
Mobile 1-251-476-4744
Daphne 1-251-928-2888
E-mail: visionrehab@bellsouth.net
Link
www.csvrlowvision.org

State Agencies
There are 2 state agencies providing low vision care and vocational rehabilitation in Alabama.

**Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS)**
ADRS has offices in Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile and several other locations throughout the state. ADRS provides outpatient and home evaluations for not only visually impaired persons but for those with any type of disability, such as deafness or paraplegia and quadriplegia and amputations.
There services are divided into those for working adults who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation and training and those (usually older) who are unable to work or are retired. Rehabilitation Teachers provide home visits and help the elderly through the OASIS (Older Alabamans System of Information and Services).
There is a Children's Rehabilitation division, which helps children with any type or combination of disabilities and may be contacted through the ADRS.

**CONTACT**
Toll-free number: 800-441-7607
Fax: 334-293-7383
[Link](http://www.rehab.state.al.us/Home/default.aspx?url=/Home/Main)

**Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind (AIDB)**
AIDB has a wide range of services and educational programs for the deaf and blind, and specializes in the education of the young. There are regional centers throughout the state offering education programs, ranging from preschool to completion of high school, including a residential program at the E.H. Gentry School in Talladega. It has educational and technology programs at the regional centers, including programs for adults.

**CONTACT:**
Phone; 1-256-761-3416
P.O. Box 698 (35161)
205 East South Street
Talladega, AL 35160
[Link](http://www.aidb.org)

**Sight Savers America**
Sight Savers is a non-profit organization that provides help to visually impaired children (less than 19 years of age) for use in the home. It will provide electronic magnifiers and other aids and devices. There are some income qualifications but they are not strenuous. Contact is:
1-877-942-2627 or [info@sightsaversamerica.org](mailto:info@sightsaversamerica.org)
Improved Lighting
Simply improving lighting, with positioning and intensity control allows some patients to see better
Large Print
Large print, as the large print check above, is a simple way to improve function
Optical Magnification
Hundreds of different optical magnifiers, illuminated and non-illuminated, are available. A functional vision evaluation aids in choosing the right type and strength.
Electronic Magnification
Electronic magnifiers, or "CCTVs", can magnify up to 100X, allowing even the severely impaired to read and see small objects. There are many versions, including small and portable devices.
Portable CCTV powered by computer
There are now many electronic magnifiers that can be connected to and powered by laptop computers
Computer software for screen magnification and reading
Special software which magnifies computer displays and reads the screen make it possible for even the totally blind to use a computer.
Tablets, smart Phones
Hand held and portable devices with improved accessibility feature are allowing the blind and visually impaired to use main-stream technology