

# Steps to Improve Independence When Living with Visual Impairment

DENVER, Colo., Feb. 1, 2022 (SEND2PRESS NEWSWIRE) – The Colorado Optometric Association (COA) and 2020 Eyes Colorado are speaking out about how to improve independence and quality of life when experiencing permanent vision loss. 2020 Eyes Colorado is the COA's eye health public awareness initiative to promote healthy eyes and vision across the state throughout the year.



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Visual impairment (low vision) may be defined as insufficient vision to do the things a person wants and needs to do. The loss of vision cannot be corrected by regular glasses, medical treatment, or surgery and can be congenital or the result of disease, and injury.

Common eye diseases that cause low vision may include macular degeneration, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and inherited retinal disease. These conditions can cause a permanent loss of central (detailed) vision, as well as a loss of peripheral (side) vision. People may have difficulty reading the newspaper, paying bills (even with reading glasses), recognizing faces, crossing streets, and seeing small print on their television.

Low vision care (also referred to as Vision Rehabilitation) helps people with low vision function as fully and independently as possible by providing devices, information, and technology.

### **Step 1: Get an Eye Exam by your Eye Care Professional**

A thorough eye examination is imperative to diagnose the reason for your decrease in vision. The eye doctor will ensure that the patient is:

- evaluated for ocular and systemic disease
- receives proper medical treatment for any eye disease
- has the best eye glass prescription possible

Due to the underlying eye disease, new glasses cannot restore vision to a level that allows you see detail (small & fine print, faces, etc.) like you did before. The eye care professional may refer out to an optometrist specializing in low vision care. Also, requesting a referral for low vision rehabilitation is an option, if there is difficulty performing daily activities.

### **Step 2: The Low Vision Evaluation**

A low vision exam with an optometrist specializing in low vision care, takes about one to two hours and is different than a typical eye exam. The low vision evaluation will focus on how the patient functions with the remaining vision and find strategies to maximize any remaining vision.

Patients can use the time during their low vision exam to discuss and understand their own specific vision goals and challenges. For example, improving facial recognition, writing, reading, color identification, and more. Bring any current glasses, magnifiers, or other low vision devices currently used, whether they are helpful or not.

### **Step 3: Discuss How to Make Reading Easier**

A conversation about how to make reading with low vision easier can produce great results. A low vision specialist can make suggestions to address specific needs. For instance, a student might require a way to read notes on a whiteboard while in class and they can troubleshoot the challenges around this together.

#### **Basic Modifications for Reading:**

- Improve overhead & task lighting.
- Use of increased magnification such as stronger reading glasses, hand-held and stand magnifiers, hand-held and spectacle mounted telescopes, and electronic video magnifiers.
- Use of auditory and large print accessibility features on your smartphone, tablet, and desk-top computers.
- Use of audiobooks through the National Library of Congress Talking Book

program.

#### **Step 4: Discuss How to Improve Quality of Life at Home & Work**

The eye doctor may refer a low vision patient to a:

- Certified Vision Rehabilitation Teacher
- Occupational Therapist who specializes in working with the visually impaired
- Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist

These professionals work with the patient in their home, community, and workplace to ensure safety and independence.

Obtaining additional strategies and modifications are critical for maintaining independence. Adjustments and organizational practices can make a huge difference. The following techniques are commonly offered, but this is also the patient's chance to troubleshoot any current issues arising at home or work:

- Improve over-head and task lighting. Consistent lighting at home can reduce the risk of falls and disorganization.
- Use contrasting colors to help identify steps, railings, knobs, switches, and anything else that is difficult to detect visually.
- Remove hazards like rugs, cords, bulky furniture, or anything that could cause a fall or injury.
- Use large print labels and tactile dots to help identify objects, numbers on the oven or microwave, telephone, remote control, and computer keyboard.
- Create an organizational system to keep track of personal items.
- Label medications or use a color code system for identifying prescription and over the counter medications.
- Troubleshoot any challenges that prevent access to a healthy diet high in nutrient dense foods like leafy greens, berries, fish, nuts, and more.

For many people dealing with permanent vision loss, they feel they "CAN'T" do the things they want and need to do. With proper vision rehabilitation services, people will have many options to improve their quality of life and independence. Talk with an eye care professional today and ask for a referral to an optometrist specializing in low vision care.

Colorado's low vision specialists are listed below. Or find a Colorado optometrist [here](https://colorado.aoa.org/doctor-locator-search) – <https://colorado.aoa.org/doctor-locator-search>

#### **COLORADO'S LOW VISION SPECIALISTS**

**Kara Hanson, OD, FAAO**

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720-848-2020

**David Lewerenz, OD, FAAO, Clinical Diplomate in Low Vision, American Academy of Optometry**

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**Dr. David Simpson**

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VA Eastern CO Healthcare System

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**Brian Meier, OD**

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Bayfield, CO 81122

970-884-2020

**George Hertneky, OD**

212 Cameron St

Brush, CO 80723

970-842-5166

**Eddy Najjar, OD**

7500 South University Blvd., Unit 104

Centennial, CO 80122

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**Craig Eckroth, OD**

450 Pershing St., Suite 100

Craig, CO 81625

970-824-3488

**Dr. Gregg Pusateri**

5614 N Union Blvd

Colorado Springs, CO 80918

719-471-3200

**Margaret "Molly" Dixon, OD, FAAO**

320 E. Fontanero, #201

Colorado Springs, CO 80907

719-599-2020

**Deanna Alexander, OD, FAAO**

702 W Drake Rd, Bldg B

Ft. Collins, CO 80526

970-221-4811

**Jennifer Zwelling, OD, FAAO**

Valley Vision

904 Pitkin Ave

Glenwood Springs, CO 81601

970-945-2020

**Dale Lervick, OD, FAAO**

7586 W Jewell Ave # 104

Lakewood, CO 80232

303-233-7575

**Kirk Matoba, OD**

200 N. Union Blvd  
Lakewood, CO 80228  
303-988-2777

**Neuro-Sight Vision Care – Drs. Jarvis, Politzer, and Chonka**

333 S Allison Pkwy # 120  
Lakewood, CO 80226  
303-989-2020

**Dr. Alex Zemke**

2290 Kipling St Unit 1  
Lakewood, CO 80215  
303-238-9900

**Craig Eckroth, OD**

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**MEDIA QUERIES:**

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**About the Colorado Optometric Association (COA):**

The Colorado Optometric Association (COA) is the professional organization of optometrists in Colorado. Over 600 Colorado Doctors of Optometry are voluntary members of the Association.

Since 1892, the COA has assisted its members in providing the highest standard of professional care to their patients by sponsoring continuing education programs for doctors, advocating in local and state governments for programs and laws that represent patients' best interests, and providing information for the public. For more information, please visit <http://www.visioncare.org/> or call 303-863-9778.