

## **MAB Community Services Vision Rehabilitation Program**

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### **WHAT TO EXPECT AT A LOW VISION CLINIC:**

For those who are going to a low vision center for the first time, it can be an overwhelming experience for the patient. Low vision exams are different from a regular exam because the focus is to use a patient's remaining eyesight to provide the best possible functioning vision. This means that as a patient you must take an active role. The more you put into it, the more successful your experience can be.

Low vision does not treat any disease conditions, nor will it make the acuity better in either the "good" or "bad" eye. Low vision rehabilitation is a process that may continue for the rest of your life, allowing you to use what vision you have to the best of your ability. The idea that someone will give you glasses or a lens and you will begin to see and read as you did before vision loss is a false expectation. Just as a person with a hip or knee replacement does not go out dancing after medical treatment, a person with vision deterioration does not go out and read immediately after medical treatment. It takes time; it is a slow process that requires hard work and dedication. This is a rehabilitation process for your vision. All our lives we went to the eye doctor and for glasses and contact lens and walked away seeing fine. This old expectation is hard to break and we must realize our eyes have some permanent damage and we have to develop new strategies to see.

Low vision is talk oriented. Each person has different needs and so every low vision exam is different. Some people want to be able to read newspapers again; others want help to see the TV, others to see the playing cards to keep up with their bridge game. At a low vision exam the doctor will discuss your goals and will select devices that will help with that goal. To use golf as an analogy, just as there are different clubs for teeing off compared to putting, there are different low vision devices for each vision task.

## **WHAT TO BRING TO A LOW VISION VISIT:**

A good starting point for low vision is to develop a list of specific tasks that you want to accomplish. In fact, if you have samples of reading material such as a Bible, favorite magazine or work papers, bring them along to your low vision appointment. If you like sewing or crafts, these are also good things to bring along so that you can see what works best for you with each task.

There will almost always be a lot of new information discussed during a low vision appointment. It is advisable to have an interested family member or friend attend with you so that you can later discuss the points brought up during your appointment. Remember that this will be your exam and you must not rely on the friend/family member to teach you any techniques later on, or ask questions for you.

## **WHEN YOU GET HOME FROM A LOW VISION VISIT:**

Many people do see immediate gains during their first low vision appointment. Family members are often very encouraged by how their family member can read. This is not always the case, though. With the help of a low vision professional, people with a visual impairment can be able to read a short amount of material from the newspaper during their appointment. Then, after returning home, the person realizes that what was accomplished for a short period during the appointment cannot be sustained at home. This realization can be discouraging, and some people want to give up. It is important to recognize that this is a rehabilitation process which requires practice. It is true that overcoming vision loss can be a slow process. It is also valuable to be kind to yourself. Give yourself encouragement instead of frustration.

Don't be afraid to try new things. If one or two devices have been recommended for you and some are not working for you, go back to the low vision clinic and try other options. Do not stick a device in a drawer and forget about it- give the low vision center a second or third try to help make it right for you. Keep an open mind; learn about the entire range of devices. There are new low vision products being developed all the time, so try to learn what new devices can help you. Centers have clear return policies that give you a chance to learn how a particular device can work for you in your home.

## **FRUSTRATED WITH LOW VISION?**

Remember, practice, practice, and practice! The more you use the devices, the more you will get out of them.

You may find that you are angry or depressed about your vision loss, or about being dependant on devices that identify you as a visually impaired person. This is normal. Consider discussing these feelings with a social worker, case manager or therapist.

## **THE FUTURE OF LOW VISION:**

As an eye disease progresses, the decrease in vision may progress and you find that devices that have worked for years no longer work. You may need stronger devices, or completely different ones. It is important to follow up with you low vision doctor on a yearly basis to see if there are new devices that will better fit your needs.