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# Communicating with Individuals who are Blind or have a Vision Impairment


## Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to offer resources in one central location for those who support or care for someone who has a vision impairment. This guide provides some basic information on vision, material on some of the most common eye disorders and how they impact a person's vision, as well as strategies to ensure effective communication when supporting these individuals. The key to achieving effective communication with a person with a vision impairment is to consciously accept the responsibility for it. How an individual is impacted will vary and communication access depends on individual needs, looking different for each person.

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## Medical Disclaimer

If you experience sudden changes in your vision — such as blurriness, double vision, flashes of light, loss of vision in one or both eyes, or severe eye pain — seek medical attention immediately. These symptoms may indicate a serious condition that requires prompt evaluation by an eye care professional or emergency medical provider.

This content is being provided for informational purposes only and can be found on trusted medical websites such as the **National Eye Institute** and the **American Academy of Opthalmology**. This content is not meant to represent medical advice or diagnostic guidance. Please consult a healthcare professional with any visual concerns.

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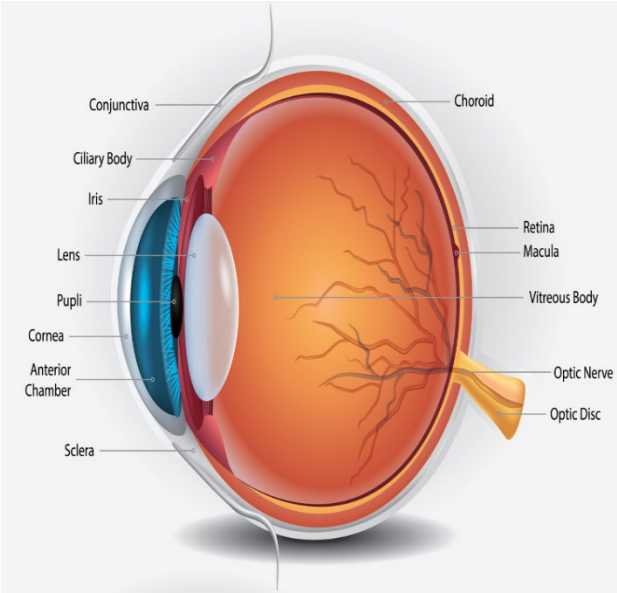
# Some Basics to Know About Vision

This section will share some key terms related to vision.

## Parts of the Eye




**Cornea**: The eye's clear, protective outer layer that sits at the front of the eye and acts as a barrier against dirt and germs and also helps filter out some of the sun's damaging ultraviolet light. It is also responsible for refracting (bending) light rays, helping to focus them onto the retina for clear vision.

**Iris**: The colored part of the eye that controls the amount of light entering the eye and controls the size of the pupil.

**Lens**: An inner part of the eye that helps the eye focus.

**Macula**: The part of the eye that controls sharp, straight-ahead or central vision and is located in the center of the retina. It is also responsible for color vision and the ability to see fine details. A healthy macula is crucial for tasks like reading and recognizing faces.

**Pupil**: The black opening in the middle of the iris (colored part of the eye) that gets bigger or smaller in response to changes in light. It lets light into your eyes, which eventually reaches the retina.

**Retina**: A light sensitive layer of tissue located at the back of the eye (innermost layer of the eye) that captures light and converts it into neural signals. It plays a crucial role in our ability to see light, color, and fine details.

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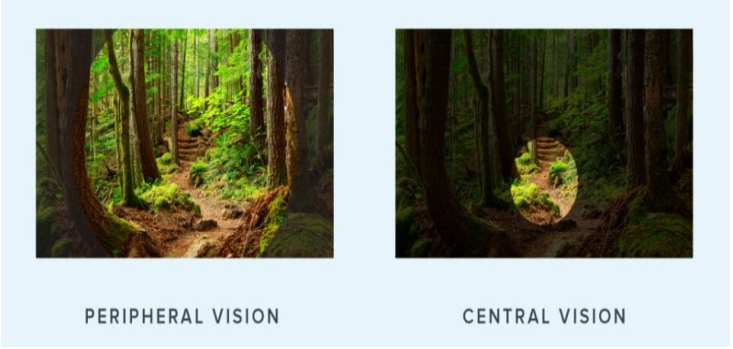
# Other Important Terms

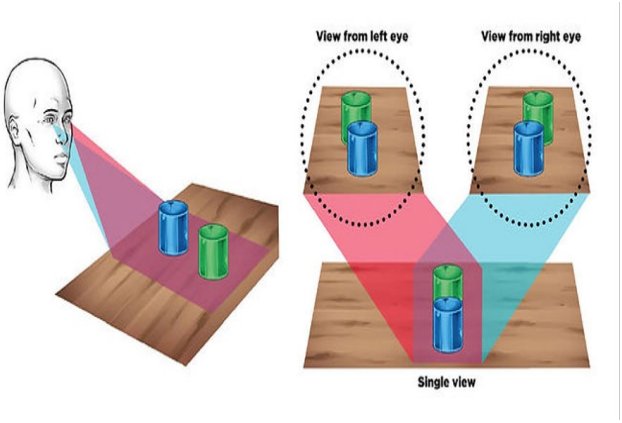
**Blindness:** A complete darkness or absence of any vision.

**Central vision**: The center of your visual field (what's directly in front of you). It is essential for performing tasks that require fine detail, such as reading, driving, and recognizing faces.

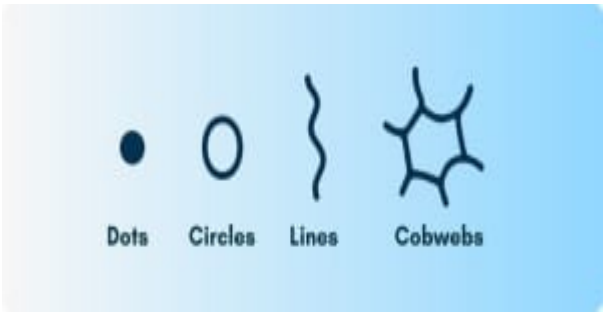
**Peripheral vision**: What you can see above, below, and on each side of your face without moving your head. It's everything you can see that isn't in your central vision. If you've ever seen something "out of the corner of your eye", this is your peripheral vision. It is used during most daily activities.




**Depth perception**: An important part of your vision that helps you see objects in three dimensions, including their size and how far away they are from you. Because your depth perception depends on information from both your eyes and your brain, anything affecting your overall vision can impact your depth perception.




**Floaters**: Small dark spots or squiggly lines that float across your vision. They can look like spots, threads, squiggly lines, or even little cobwebs. Many individuals have floaters that come and go, but sometimes they can be a sign of a more serious eye condition. If you notice new floaters that appear suddenly and don't go away, it's important to tell your eye doctor.



**Low vision/Partially Sighted/Visually Impaired**: Individuals with a severe enough vision impairment in the structure and functioning of their eyes, that even with the best possible treatment or correction, the impairment still interferes with their ability to learn and perform daily living activities.

**Legal blindness:** A term used in the United States to determine eligibility for certain benefits and programs. Currently this is defined as a visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better-seeing eye with correction (with glasses or contact lenses). On the Snellen Eye Chart, the person could only read line 1 (the big "E") from 20 feet away while wearing glasses or contact lenses.

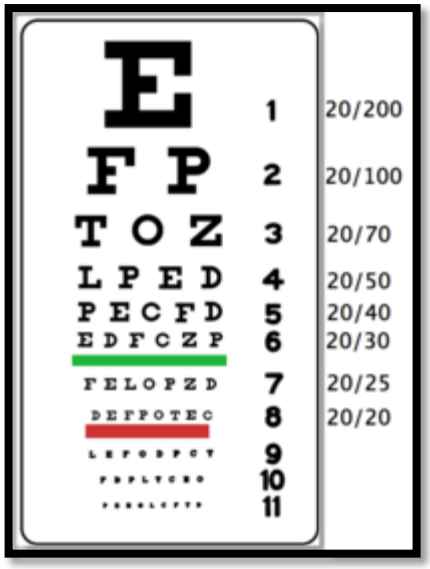
**Refractive errors**: A type of vision problem that makes it difficult to see clearly. They happen when the shape of your eye keeps light from focusing correctly on your retina. They are the most common type of vision problem and include myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness), astigmatism, and presbyopia. The most common symptom is blurry vision.

**Tunnel vision**: A condition in which objects cannot be seen clearly unless they are directly in front of you. It is the loss of your peripheral vision.


**Visual Acuity:** A number that indicates the sharpness or clarity of vision.

In the United States, the most common test doctors use is the Snellen Eye Chart to measure a person's visual acuity. For example, if the person read line 8 (D E F P O T E C) from 20 feet away, the person's vision (or visual acuity) would be 20/20. If the smallest print the person read was line 3 (T O Z) from 20 feet away, the person's vision (or visual acuity) would be 20/70.

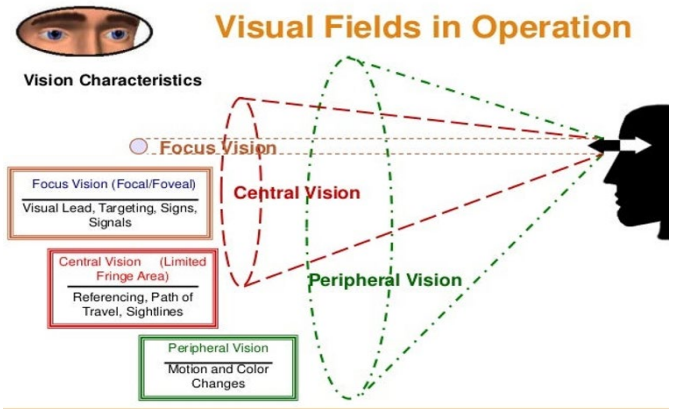
The results of the test are usually given in a fraction form. The first number is the distance you stood when viewing the chart (typically 20 feet) and the second digit is the distance in which a person with normal vision would see what the person read well.




A visual acuity measurement of 20/70 means that a person with 20/70 vision who is 20 feet from an eye chart sees what a person with unimpaired (or 20/20) vision can see from 70 feet away.

**Visual attention**: The ability to select and focus on specific information within our visual environment (e.g., an object, person, or task).

**Visual field**: Everything you can see. It includes peripheral and central vision.




**Visual functioning:** How an individual uses any remaining vision that they have to perform daily living activities.

**Visual impairment:** A general term to describe a wide range of visual function. This may include individuals who have a mild vision impairment, a moderate impairment, or blindness.

**Visual recognition**: The ability to process, interpret, and recognize what one is looking at.

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# Strategies to Support Effective Communication

*For information and guidance unique to each condition, please refer to the diagnosis page for the condition, which can be accessed using the Table of Contents.

## General Strategies:

- Communicate using the individual's strongest sensory channel(s).
- Talk in a normal tone of voice. Vision loss is not deafness.
- Rephrase or repeat information, if needed.
- Follow the individual's communicative lead.
- Learn how much the condition affects their vision and how much vision is accessible.
- Consider whether behavior indicates that there is difficulty with vision and/or communication.
- Provide additional time (wait time) to allow processing.
- Maintain a consistent communication approach to ensure clarity and understanding.
- Tune into the individual's facial expressions, body language, tone, and behaviors to recognize communication attempts and respond accordingly.
- Don't mistake head tilting, squinting, or eye closing as disengagement.

## Strategies for Environment/Surroundings:

- Communicate in well-lit areas.
- Have the individual's back to light sources/windows (to reduce glare).
- Reduce visual distractions (too many bright colors, busy backgrounds, etc.).
- Adapt the environment when possible – minimize visual clutter, use colors that have high contrast, consistent layout, textured surfaces, tactile markers, etc.
- Avoid moving an item(s) without informing the individual or asking permission.
- Wear colors that contrast with skin tone (solid colors are best).

- Allow time for the individual to become familiar with a new environment.
- Use contrasting backgrounds to help images/objects stand out (such as a solid dark placement and a white plate).
- Clearly mark changes in the environment (e.g., steps or entrances).

## Strategies for Respectful Interactions:

- When communicating, choose a distance that allows the individual to detect the distinction of facial features, but also considers the individual's personal space and comfort level.
- Ask first if help is needed, e.g., "May I help lead you to the buffet?" instead of just guiding them.
- Get the individual's attention (say their name, use touch cue, etc.) and identify yourself before beginning a communication attempt.
- Always talk directly to the person, even if they have a sighted companion.
- Inform the individual when leaving the room or moving away.
- Identify people and topics clearly (instead of "she said" say "Julie said").
- Verbally describe directions/actions and be specific (say "the telephone is on your left" instead of "the telephone is over there").
- Use short, simple sentences, avoid jargon, and speak slowly.
- Do not touch or feed a guide dog without permission.
- Be patient and listen respectfully.

## Strategies for Accessible Methods of Communication:

- Provide information in an alternative accessible way (audio, large-print, Braille, and objects).
- Use multiple modes of communication (natural gestures, visual aids, sign language, tactile supports, assistive technology, pictures, and/or objects).
- Use hand-under-hand when helping an individual touch/grasp something; respect their hands.
- Describe visual content clearly and use vivid, sensory-rich language that engages the individual's other senses.
- Use screen reader friendly documents.
- Use verbal responses instead of non-verbal cues.

# Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)


**Description:** Results in damaged sharp and central vision, due to damage to the macula (the part of the eye that controls sharp, straight-ahead vision). It is a progressive eye disease that leads to gradual loss of central vision, primarily affecting older adults.

**Causes:** Aging, genetics, and smoking.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Loss of the central vision needed to see details straight ahead
- Blurry or wavy areas in central vision
- Difficulty seeing objects clearly, especially while reading or driving
- Difficulty seeing fine details
- Trouble seeing in low lighting

**Did You Know?** 11 million people in the United States have AMD.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Amblyopia (Lazy Eye)

**Description:** Also referred to as "**lazy eye**". It begins in childhood and happens when the vision in one eye is reduced, because the eye and the brain are not working together properly.

**Causes:** Premature birth, smaller than average at time of birth, family history, developmental disabilities, and other vision problems such as refractive errors, strabismus, or cataracts.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

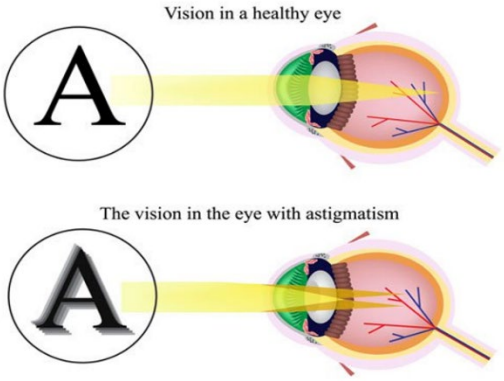
- Poor depth perception
- Difficulty telling how near or far something is
- Squinting
- Shutting one eye
- Tilting of head

**Did You Know?** Amblyopia has historically been treated with medical eye patches.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Allow the individual time to adjust their gaze and be patient as they adjust.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Astigmatism




**Description:** A refractive error that can make vision blurry or distorted and happens when the cornea (the clear front layer of the eye) or lens (an inner part of the eye that helps the eye focus) has a different shape than normal. Many individuals may experience only minor fluctuations in symptoms, however for some people it can worsen over time.

**Causes:** Eye injuries or eye surgeries.

## How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Blurry/distorted vision
- Needing to squint to see clearly
- Headaches
- Eye strain
- Difficulty seeing at night

**Did You Know?** Doctors can also use surgery to treat astigmatism. The surgery changes the shape of the cornea so that it can focus light correctly.

## Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Bietti's Crystalline Dystrophy (BCD)

**Description:** A rare genetic disease where crystals made of fatty acids build up in the cornea (clear outer layer at the front of the eye) and the retina (light-sensitive layer of tissue in the back of the eye).

**Causes:** Family history (parents have it) and being East Asian.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Blurry or hazy vision
- Trouble seeing in low light
- Not being able to see things out of the corner of the eye (peripheral vision)
- Trouble seeing certain colors
- Loss of most or all of vision

**Did You Know?** BCD is a genetic disease, and an individual will only have symptoms if both parents have the BCD gene and pass it down. If only one parent has the gene, an individual will carry the BCD gene but won't have any symptoms.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Use tactile labels or Braille stickers (tactile labels with stamped characters in Braille) to identify items based on color.
- Organize items by shape or pattern rather than color.

- Use descriptive language when communicating about colors (e.g., “dark”, “light”, “warm”) instead of color names.
- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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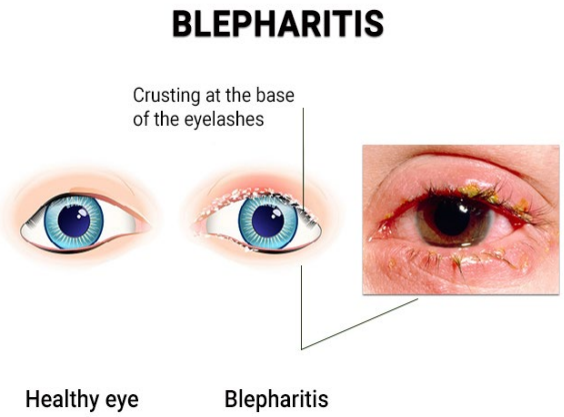
# Blepharitis




**Description:** A common eye condition that makes the eyelids red, swollen, irritated, and itchy, due to having excessive bacteria on the eyelids at the base of the eyelashes. It is not contagious and usually doesn’t cause any lasting damage.

**Causes:** Having dandruff (flaky patches of skin on scalp or face, rosacea (skin condition causing redness and bumps on face), oily skin, and having allergies that affect the eyelashes.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Feeling like there’s something in the eye
- Burning, stinging, itchy, or watery eyes
- Sensitivity to light
- Red and swollen eyes or eyelids
- Dry eyes
- Crusty eyelids or eyelashes after waking up
- Tears that are foamy or contain small bubbles
- Blurry vision

- Loss of eyelashes or eyelashes growing in the wrong direction

**Did You Know?** Although blepharitis usually doesn't go away completely, people can manage symptoms by regularly cleaning their eyelids.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- **Eliminate bright lighting and ensure access to hats, sunglasses, or specialized tinted eyewear.**
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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## Blindness

**Description:** The inability to see or a lack of vision. In the most severe cases, there's also an inability to see light. Blindness cannot be corrected with eyeglasses, contact lenses, or other medical therapy or surgery.

There are different types of blindness:

- **Partial blindness:** Having some vision and often referred to as "low vision".
- **Complete blindness:** Inability to see or detect light. This condition is very rare.
- **Congenital blindness:** Having poor vision present from birth.
- **Nutritional blindness:** Having vision loss from a vitamin A deficiency. This type of blindness can make it more difficult to see at night or in dim light.

- **Legal blindness:** When central vision is 20/200 (have to be 10 times closer or an object has to be 10 times larger in order to see, compared to a person with 20/20 vision) in their best seeing eye, even when corrected with glasses or contact lenses. An individual can also be legally blind if their field of vision or peripheral vision is severely reduced (less than 20 degrees).

**Causes:** Injuries, infections, and certain diseases (e.g., age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, stroke, etc.).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

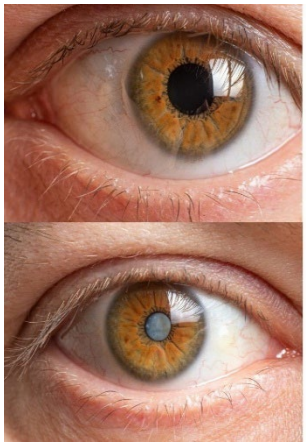
- Blurry vision
- Eye pain
- Sensitivity to light (photophobia)
- Sudden loss of vision, or the sudden appearance of black spots in your vision

**Did You Know?** Preventable blindness or avoidable blindness refers to blindness that happens to individuals that have a disease that is treatable, but they never receive care. This often happens because of a lack of access to eye care or healthcare.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Understand the individual's unique vision loss and do not assume the individual has complete blindness.
- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- Slowly move communication aids (communication boards, pictures, objects).
- Describe visual information verbally.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Cataract




**Description:** A cloudy area in the lens of the eye (the clear part of the eye that helps to focus light), and are common as people age, which over time can lead to vision loss.

## Stages of Cataracts:

- **Stage 1:** Early cataracts - Slightly blurry vision.
- **Stage 2:** Immature cataracts – Blurred vision in low light.
- **Stage 3:** Mature cataracts – Difficulty driving at night.
- **Stage 4:** Hypermature cataracts – Eye appears yellow or cloudy.

**Causes:** Aging, having certain health conditions (diabetes), smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, family history, eye injuries, eye surgeries, radiation treatment, a lot of time in the sun, and steroids.

## How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Cloudy or blurry vision
- Colors look faded
- Poor night vision
- Lights appearing too bright
- Seeing a halo around lights
- Seeing double

**Did You Know?** Cataracts are the leading cause of blindness worldwide and the leading cause of vision loss in the United States.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Eliminate bright lighting and ensure access to hats, sunglasses, or specialized tinted eyewear.
- Use tactile labels or Braille stickers (such as sticky bump dots) to identify items based on color.
- Organize items by shape or pattern rather than color.
- Use descriptive language when communicating about colors (e.g., “dark”, “light”, “warm”) instead of color names.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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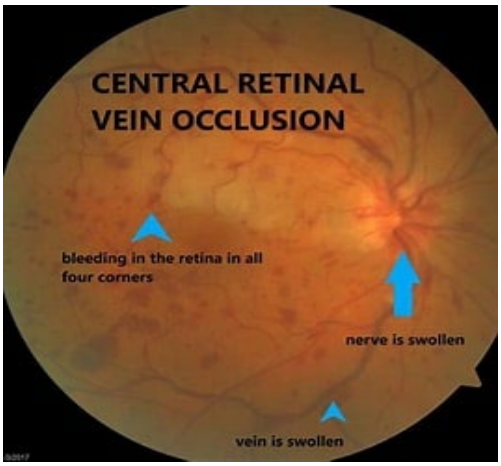
# Central Retinal Vein Occlusion (CRVO)




**Description:** An eye condition that affects the retina (the light-sensitive layer of tissue in the back of the eye) and happens when a blood clot blocks the main vein where blood flows out of the retina. It usually only affects one eye.

**Causes:** Being over the age of 50, high blood pressure, diabetes, glaucoma, and arteriosclerosis (hardening of the arteries).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Blurry vision
- Pain or redness in eye (in severe cases)
- Vision loss (if not treated early)

**Did You Know?** Central Retinal Vein Occlusion (CRVO) is relatively common and is the second most frequent retinal vascular problem (abnormality caused by changes or damage to the blood

vessels in the retina), after diabetic retinopathy. However, it is considered less common than Branch Retinal Vein Occlusion (BRVO), affecting about 1 in 1,000 people.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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# Cerebral/Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI)

**Description:** A disorder caused by damage to the parts of the brain that process vision. It is most common for babies and young children but can continue into adulthood. Individuals with CVI often have healthy eyes and obtain normal results on an eye exam. CVI does not have an impact on visual acuity, contrast sensitivity, or many of the other symptoms of visual impairments.

**Causes:** Brain or head injuries, premature birth, lack of oxygen or blood supply to the brain (such as a stroke), hydrocephalus (excessive fluid in the brain), infections that reach the brain, and genetic conditions.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Difficulty understanding and responding to things seen
- Trouble seeing certain parts of what is in front of them (busy scenes)
- Recognizing faces and objects is hard
- Difficulty recognizing things in cluttered spaces
- Reaching for something while looking at it may be challenging (coordinating eye and hand movements)

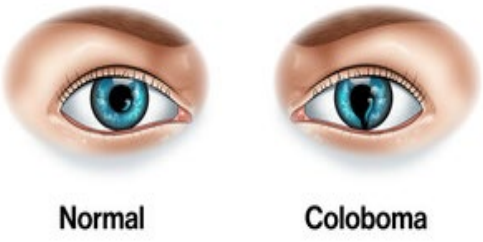
- Experiencing visual fatigue and overwhelm while detecting or noticing movement may be a challenge
- Trouble with gaze control

**Did You Know?** CVI is a leading cause of vision loss in children and the leading cause of congenital blindness (vision loss at birth) in the United States.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Limit movement since too much motion can disrupt visual attention.
- Confirm understanding and do not assume that visual access or looking equals understanding.
- Present materials in the individual's preferred visual field (many individuals have field preferences).
- Name objects before showing them.
- Slowly present and move communication aids (communication boards, pictures, objects).
- Allow extra time for the individual to become aware visually and to visually attend, recognize, and respond to stimuli.
- Move items, especially if the individual has difficulty seeing them at a distance.
- Gently orient the individual's body to help them see items or objects.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- Use clear spatial organization in the individual's environment.
- Encourage and support use of the individual's other senses (using vision can be tiring).
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Coloboma




**Description:** Occurs when normal tissue in or around the eye is missing at birth and causes a hole in one of the structures of the eye. It occurs during pregnancy and can affect one or both eyes. The most common colobomas develop in the iris (colored part of eye) and cause the pupil (round opening at center of iris) to have a keyhole or cat-eye shape. The shape depends on where in the iris the coloboma is and how much tissue is missing.

**Causes:** Genetics and alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

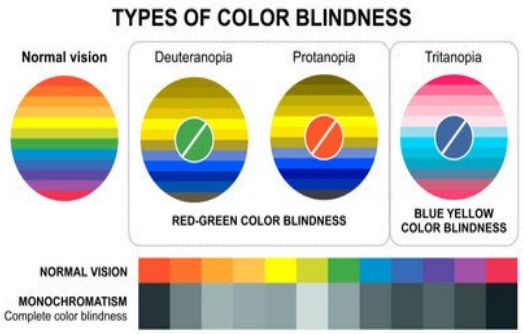
- Vision loss or blindness
- Sensitivity to light
- Blind spots
- Blurry vision

**Did You Know?** Coloboma often occurs with conditions that affect other parts of the body, like CHARGE syndrome and Wolf-Hirschhorn syndrome.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Eliminate bright lighting and ensure access to hats, sunglasses, or tinted eyewear.
- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Color Blindness




**Description:** Also known as color vision deficiency, this is when people see colors differently than most people, and it is hard to tell the difference between certain colors.

**Causes:** Family history, certain eye diseases, injuries (to retina, optic nerve, or brain), certain health problems (diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, or multiple sclerosis), certain medications, and being Caucasian.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Trouble telling the difference between colors, especially between reds and greens and blues and yellows
- Difficulty detecting the brightness of colors
- Difficulty seeing different shades of colors
- Not seeing color at all (rare cases)

**Did You Know?** Males have a much higher risk than women for color vision deficiency. About 1 in 12 males have color vision deficiency.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Use tactile labels or Braille stickers (such as sticky bump dots) to identify items based on color.
- Organize items by shape or pattern rather than color.
- Use descriptive language when communicating about colors (e.g., "dark", "light", "warm") instead of color names.

- See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.

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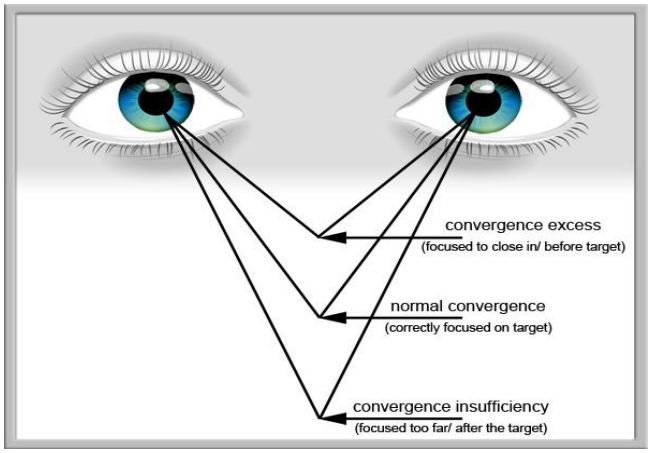
# Convergence Insufficiency




**Description:** An eye condition that affects how the eyes work together when looking at objects and happens when nerves controlling the eye muscles don't work the right way.

**Causes:** Brain injuries, including concussion injuries.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

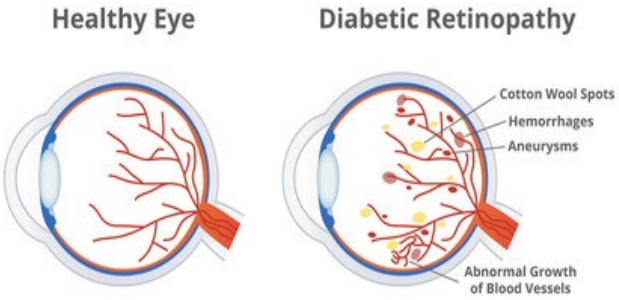
- Blurry or double vision with close objects
- Tired or sore eyes
- Headaches
- Trouble concentrating
- Difficulty reading
- Squinting
- Rubbing eyes
- Closing one eye

**Did You Know?** People can have perfect vision and still have convergence insufficiency. Regular eye exams won't detect it.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.

# Diabetic Retinopathy (DR)




**Description:** Progressive damage to the blood vessels of the retina (the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye) that is necessary for good vision. It affects people with diabetes.

**Causes:** Uncontrolled or untreated diabetes and high blood sugar.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

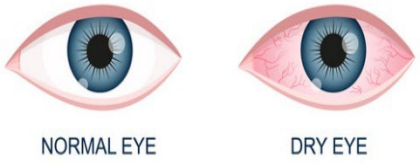
- Blurry vision
- Floating spots in field of vision/streaks that look like cobwebs
- Vision loss and/or blindness
- Difficulty reading and seeing things far away

**Did You Know?** DR is the leading cause of blindness in American adults of working age.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Dry Eye




**Description:** Happens when the individual's eyes don't make enough tears to stay wet or tears don't work correctly. Dry eye is considered a chronic and progressive condition that can worsen over time if not adequately treated.

**Causes:** Age 50 or older, being female, wearing contact lenses, not enough Vitamin A or omega-3 fatty acids, and having certain autoimmune conditions (lupus or Sjogren syndrome).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

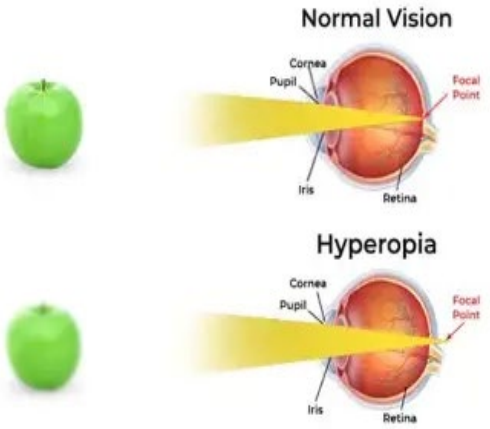
- Stinging or burning of eyes
- Dry or scratchy feeling (like there's something in the eye)
- Blurry vision
- Red eyes
- Sensitivity to light

**Did You Know?** Dry eye is common and affects nearly 16.4 million Americans and often affects individuals who spend a lot of time looking at screens or devices.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Eliminate bright lighting and ensure access to hats, sunglasses, or tinted eyewear.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Farsightedness (Hyperopia)




**Description:** A refractive error that makes nearby objects look blurry and happens when the shape of the eye makes light focus behind the retina (the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye), instead of on it.

**Causes:** Family history

## How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Difficulty seeing things up close
- Eye strain (eyes feel tired or sore)
- Headaches (especially when reading)

**Did You Know?** Undiagnosed hyperopia in children can affect their ability to read and learn, highlighting the importance of early eye exams.

## Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Glaucoma


**Description:** A group of progressive diseases that can damage the eye's optic nerve (a nerve in the back of the eye).

Glaucoma occurs when the normal fluid pressure inside the eye slowly rises. However, it can also occur with normal eye pressure.

**Causes:** People over the age of 60, Hispanic/Latino, African American, or Asian, and family history.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

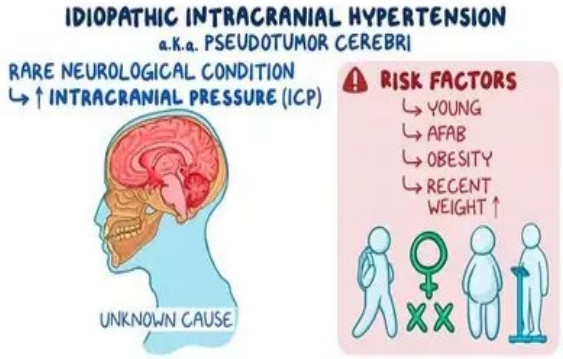
- Loss of peripheral (side) vision
- Blind spots
- Blindness

**Did You Know?** Glaucoma is often called the “silent thief of sight” because it can cause vision loss without noticeable symptoms until significant damage has occurred.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Idiopathic Intracranial Hypertension (IIH)




**Description:** Fluid around the brain and spinal cord builds up in the skull, which puts extra pressure on the brain and on the optic nerve (nerve at the back of the eye). Can be progressive if left untreated.

**Causes:** Females between the ages of 20 to 50, overweight or obese (a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30), and recent weight gain.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Headaches
- Tinnitus (ringing in ears)
- Temporary blindness
- Double vision
- Blind spots
- Neck and shoulder pain
- Peripheral (side) vision loss

**Did You Know?** Symptoms often mimic symptoms of a brain tumor, so IIH is sometimes called pseudotumor cerebri, or “false tumor”.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- Describe visual information verbally.

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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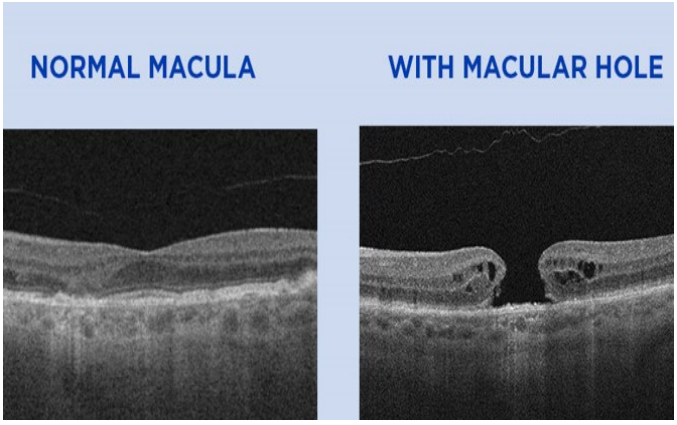
# Macular Hole




**Description:** A rare condition that can blur central vision. It occurs when an opening forms in the macula (the light-sensitive layer of tissue at the back of the eye), usually after being stretched or pulled.

**Causes:** Being over the age of 60, having severe nearsightedness (myopia), eye injuries, and eye surgeries.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Loss of central vision (blurred or blind spot)
- Distorted or blurry vision when looking straight ahead
- Lines or straight objects look bent, wavy, or like they're missing a piece in the center
- When reading the person may see the lines, but miss letters or words in the center
- May be able to see a person's face but not their nose or eyes

**Did You Know?** Macular holes are not the same as age-related macular degeneration, although they can cause similar symptoms and are common after the age of 60.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Avoid presenting items or objects directly in front of the individual (in their central vision).
- Describe visual information verbally.

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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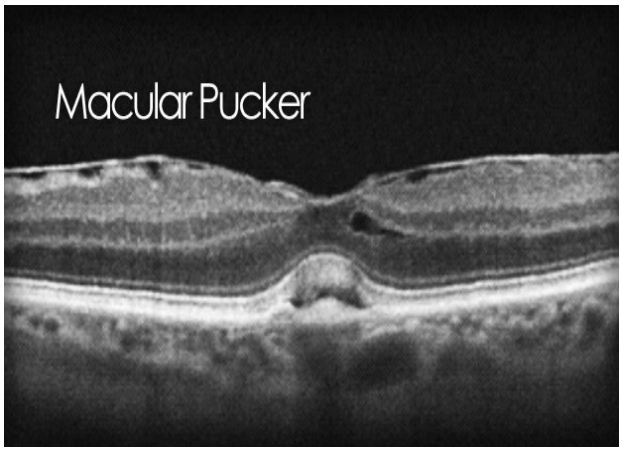
# Macular Pucker




**Description:** A rare condition that occurs when a thin layer of scar tissue forms on the macula (the central part of the retina responsible for sharp, detailed vision). It can lead to a wrinkling of the retina, which may distort vision. There are currently no known causes for it, and it usually affects one eye.

**Causes:** Aging, floaters, eye injuries, laser treatment, eye surgeries, have had vitreous detachment, a retinal tear or retinal detachment, or uveitis (inflammation of eye).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Blurry or waxy vision
- Things appear wavy or distorted
- Letters or words might be missing, crowded, or difficult to read
- Trouble seeing small details
- Double vision in some cases

**Did You Know?** Macular puckers and age-related macular degeneration are not the same, although they may have similar symptoms.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Face the individual and speak clearly.
- Describe visual information verbally.

- For written and visual supports, use large-print materials, high contrast colors, Sans-serif fonts, shorter lines of text, extra line spacing to reduce distortion effects, and avoid italics.
- Slowly move communication aids (communication boards, pictures, objects).
- Allow breaks for visual rest.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- Confirm understanding since visual distortion can cause misreading or missed details.
- Limit glare and harsh lighting.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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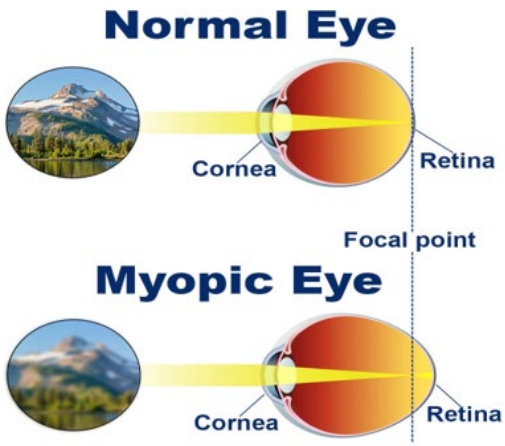
# Nearsightedness (Myopia)




**Description:** A refractive error that happens when the shape of the eye makes light focus in front of the retina (a light-sensitive layer of tissue at the back of the eye), instead of on it. It is a progressive disease, with a gradual worsening of symptoms.

**Causes:** Family history and being between the ages of 6 and 14.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Difficulty seeing things far away
- Needing to squint to see clearly
- Eye strain (eyes feel tired or sore)
- Far-away objects appear blurry

**Did You Know?** Research has found that spending time playing outside as a child may reduce the chances of nearsightedness, and existing nearsightedness may progress less quickly.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- For written and visual supports, use large-print materials, high contrast colors, Sans-serif fonts, extra spacing, and avoid italics and glossy materials.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- Provide seating accommodations to ensure that the individual has access to information (close to speakers, boards, materials, or screens).
- Use the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds to refresh vision.
- Minimize glare (use a soft background light).
- Provided printed copies of all material so the individual can view them up close.
- Confirm understanding and clarify any missed details.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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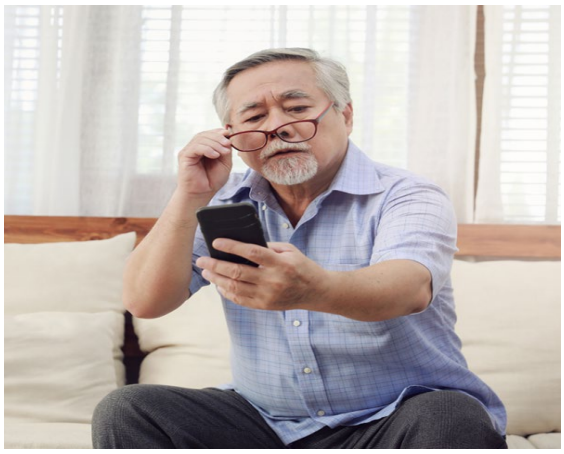
# Presbyopia



**Description:** A refractive error that happens when the lens of the eye (the inner part of the eye that helps the eye focus) hardens and becomes less flexible with age and stops focusing light correctly on the retina (the light-sensitive layer of tissue at the back of the eye). It is a progressive disease, with symptoms gradually worsening over time.

**Causes:** Aging (over the age of 45).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Difficulty seeing things up close
- Needing to hold reading material further away to focus
- Eye strain (eyes feel tired or sore)
- Headaches
- Nearby objects look blurry

**Did You Know?** Presbyopia is a normal part of aging.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Allow appropriate reading distance and avoid presenting reading material, objects, and visual supports close up.
- For written and visual supports, use large-print materials, high contrast colors, Sans-serif fonts, shorter lines of text, extra line spacing, and avoid fine print.
- Increase screen brightness for any assistive technology devices while avoiding a glare.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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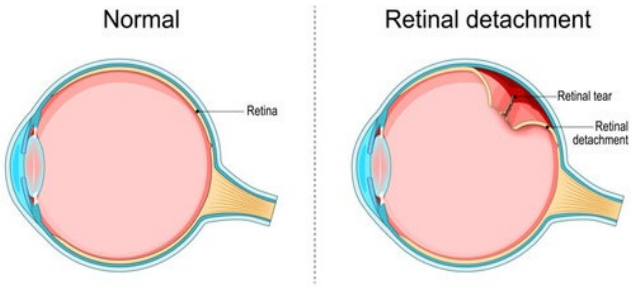
# Retinal Detachment




**Description:** When the retina (the light-sensitive layer of tissue at the back of the eye) is pulled away from its normal position at the back of the eye.

**Causes:** Family history, personal history, aging, serious eye injuries, eye surgeries, having diabetic retinopathy, extreme nearsightedness (myopia), and other eye diseases.

**How it Affects Everyday Life:**

- A sudden increase in floaters (small dark spots or squiggly lines that float across the field of vision)
- Flashes of light in one eye or both eyes
- Presents as a “curtain” or shadow

**Did You Know?** Retinal detachment is a medical emergency and if people experience symptoms, it’s important to get to an eye doctor or the emergency room immediately.

**Strategies to Support Effective Communication:**

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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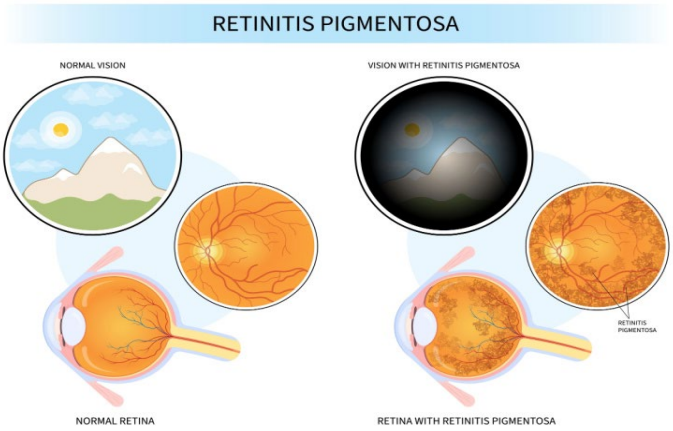
# Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP)




**Description:** A group of rare progressive eye diseases that affect the retina (light-sensitive layer of tissue in the back of the eye). RP causes cells in the retina to break down slowly over time and eventually individuals will lose most of their vision. An individual is born with RP.

**Causes:** Family genetics, some medicines, infections, eye injuries, and other genetic conditions (Usher syndrome).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

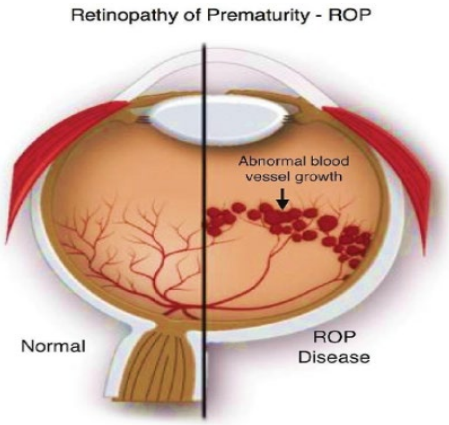
- Loss of night vision (most common early symptom)
- Vision loss
- Blindness
- Loss of peripheral (side) vision
- Tunnel vision (only have some central vision)
- Loss of color vision
- Sensitivity to bright light

**Did You Know?** Although Retinitis Pigmentosa is degenerative and will get worse over time, Vitamin A may help slow vision loss.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Eliminate bright lighting and ensure access to hats, sunglasses, or specialized tinted eyewear.
- Use tactile labels or Braille stickers (such as sticky bump dots) to identify items based on color.
- Organize items by shape or pattern rather than color.
- Use descriptive language when communicating about colors (e.g., “dark”, “light”, “warm”) instead of color names.
- Describe visual information verbally.
- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP)




**Description:** When abnormal blood vessels grow in the retina (light-sensitive layer of tissue in the back of the eye). It is a progressive disease, beginning with mild changes in the vessels, which can progress to more severe changes if not treated.

**Causes:** Born prematurely before 30 weeks gestation, weighing less than three pounds at birth, and medical problems with the heart, lungs, or brain from premature birth.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Unusual eye movements
- Eyes wander or shake
- Eyes don't follow objects
- Difficulty recognizing faces
- White pupils
- Vision loss
- Blindness

**Did You Know?** There are usually no obvious early signs or symptoms. It is usually detected by an eye exam.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Slowly move communication aids (communication boards, pictures, objects).
- Never assume total blindness or full sight. Describe visual information verbally.

- Confirm understanding since visual distortion can cause misreading or missed details.
- Be mindful of personal space and avoid sudden movements that may startle the person.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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# Stargardt Disease

**Description:** A rare progressive genetic eye disease that happens when fatty material builds up on the macula (the small part of the retina needed for sharp, central vision). Usually caused by changes in a gene called ABCA4, which is a gene that affects how the body uses vitamin A.

**Causes:** Genetics

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Loss of central vision
- Sensitivity to light
- Gray, black, or hazy spots
- Needing more time for the eyes to adjust between light and dark spaces
- Color blindness

**Did You Know?** Each parent needs to have one copy of the mutated gene to pass it on. Each parent may not have symptoms of the condition.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Describe visual information verbally.

- Avoid presenting items or objects directly in front of the individual (in their central vision).
- For written and visual supports, use large-print materials, high contrast colors, Sans-serif fonts, shorter lines of text, extra spacing to reduce distortion effects, and avoid italics.
- Allow extended time for an individual's eyes to adjust to environments with different lighting.
- Eliminate bright lighting and ensure access to hats, sunglasses, or specialized tinted eyewear.
- Use tactile labels or Braille stickers (such as sticky bump dots) to identify items based on color.
- Organize items by shape or pattern rather than color.
- Use descriptive language when communicating about colors (e.g., "dark", "light", "warm") instead of color names.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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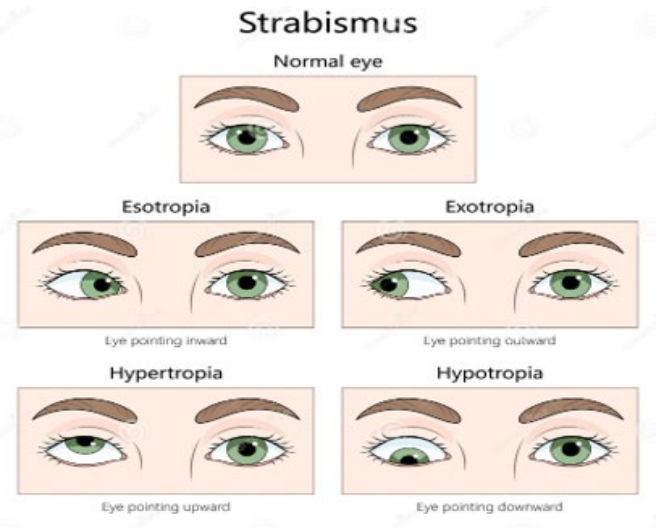
# Strabismus




**Description:** A condition in which the six muscles that control eye movement have problems controlling eye movement and cause one eye to turn in a direction that's different from the other eye (eyes don't line up with one another). Usually found in children but it can also affect adults.

**Causes:** Strokes, physical trauma, neurological disorder, uncorrected refractive errors, poor vision in one eye, cerebral palsy, brain tumor, Down syndrome, and family history.

## How it Affects Everyday Life:

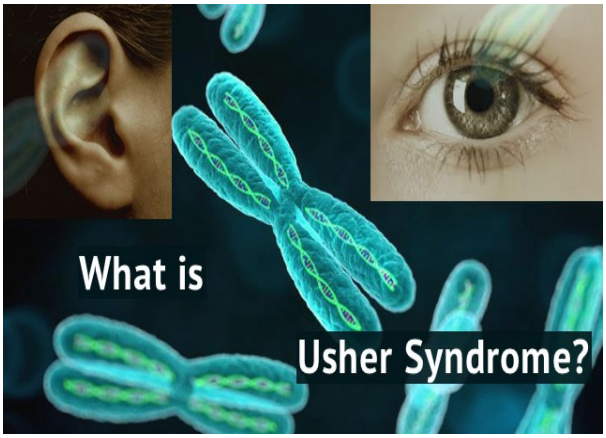
- Double vision
- Closing or covering one eye while looking at something nearby
- Tilting or turning head
- Headaches
- Difficulty reading
- Eye strain
- Closing one eye when looking at objects that are far away or in bright light.

**Did You Know?** Strabismus is also referred to as being “cross eyed”.

## Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Reduce visual demand and provide visual breaks, especially during long or detailed tasks.
- Describe visual information verbally
- Confirm understanding since visual distortion can cause misreading or missed details.
- For written and visual supports, use large-print materials, high contrast colors, Sans-serif fonts, shorter lines of text, and break information into sections or bullets.
- Limit glare and harsh lighting.
- Normalize varied eye contact (engagement doesn’t require sustained eye contact).
- Allow extra processing time.
- Do not focus on or reference eye alignment.
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

# Usher Syndrome




**Description:** A rare genetic and progressive disease that an individual is born with. It causes deafness or hearing loss, an eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa (RP) and can also affect balance.

## Types of Usher Syndrome

There are 3 types of Usher Syndrome, with each type causing different health problems. Types 1 and 2 are the most common.

**Type 1**

- Profound hearing loss or being deaf at birth
- Loss of night vision by age 10, with severe vision loss by midlife
- Balance problems, including trouble sitting up and walking

**Type 2**

- Moderate to severe hearing loss in early childhood
- Loss of night vision by teenage years, with severe vision loss by midlife
- Normal balance

**Type 3**

- Normal hearing at birth, with hearing loss starting in childhood
- Loss of night vision by teenage years, with severe vision loss by midlife
- Normal balance

**Causes:** Genetics (parents having Usher syndrome).

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Hearing loss or deafness
- Loss of night vision and peripheral (side) vision
- Balance problems
- Retinitis pigmentosa (everyone with Usher syndrome develops this)
- Trouble moving around in the dark
- Taking longer adjusting to lighting changes
- Tripping over objects

**Did You Know?** Recent clinical trials are studying a new type of gene therapy that targets one of the most common mutations that cause Usher syndrome, which could lead to new treatment that improves vision.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- Present items centrally or directly in front of the individual (individual may not have peripheral vision).
- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**

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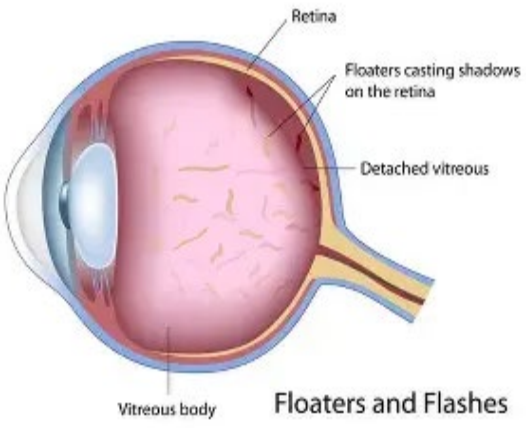
# Vitreous Detachment

**Description:** The vitreous is gel-like fluid that fills the eye and is filled with tiny fibers that attach to the retina (the light-sensitive layer of tissue at the back of the eye). It occurs when these fibers of the vitreous pull away from the retina.



Floaters and Flashes

**Causes:** Being over the age of 50 (increases with age), having myopia (nearsightedness), and having vitreous detachment in the other eye.

### How it Affects Everyday Life:

- Floaters (small dark spots or squiggly lines that float across the field of vision)
- Flashes of light in peripheral (side) vision
- Retinal tear/detachment
- Macular hole/Macular pucker
- Vision loss

**Did You Know?** Vitreous detachment is not preventable and is a natural occurrence as an individual ages.

### Strategies to Support Effective Communication:

- **See Strategies to Support Effective Communication for Individuals with Vision Loss.**