

What is an Occupational Therapist?

An Occupational Therapist is a health professional who helps people with low vision maintain and regain their independence in a range of everyday tasks. This may include cooking, personal care, housework, making a cup of tea or using the telephone.

An Occupational Therapist assists people with vision impairment perform practical everyday tasks by providing them with the skills and strategies to maintain their quality of life.

Occupational Therapists show people with low vision how they can make the most of their remaining vision as well as using other senses like touch, hearing and smell to perform daily activities.

Examples of these strategies include:

- Better lighting
- Increasing size
- Creating contrast

Macular Degeneration results in a loss of central vision. People use their central vision on a daily basis, whether it is to see the food on a plate or to see when a cup is full. It can be frustrating to lose central vision and not be able to do these everyday tasks as easily. Occupational Therapists work with people who have MD to introduce strategies or equipment which makes those tasks easier.

If you are having difficulty around the home, and would like some practical solutions to live more independently in your home, workplace or community, call the MD Foundation for contacts in your state or territory.

Electronic Voting Trial

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has set up a trial of Electronic Voting for electors who are blind or vision impaired.

Electronic voting, or E-Voting, uses electronic-assisted voting machines to aid people with low vision. The machine is similar to a computer screen, with voters touching the screen to lodge their vote.

The first trials will be conducted at up to 30 pre-poll locations around Australia leading up to election day. The locations of these trials are yet to be determined.

IMPORTANT: Remember to take your own magnifier with you to the polling booth. The writing on the ballot paper is small and it is often hard to see where to place your vote.

HANDY HINT

Assistance with voting can be provided for visually impaired people if needed. Polling staff are trained in how to help you, so be sure to ask if you are having trouble.



Slips, Trips and Falls

Slips, trips and falls can happen to anyone, although the likelihood of having a fall is increased as a person ages or if they are vision impaired. This can result in injury.

Falls prevention strategies are important for those with low vision and will help maintain independence. It is a good idea to have these strategies in place which can assist you if a fall occurs. This could include carrying a cordless or mobile phone with pre-programmed emergency numbers (such as 000), or leaving a spare key to your home with a trusted friend or neighbour.

There are many ways to prevent falls from occurring. Inactive or unfit people tend to have poorer balance and weaker muscles and can be unsteady when walking. This can increase the risk of falling. Physical activity keeps us healthy and helps to improve balance, muscle strength and flexibility.

If you have had a bad fall it is natural to feel worried about falling again. Talk to your doctor about your concerns, or talk to a physiotherapist about ways you can improve your balance and strength.



If you have concerns about getting out and about in your community or around your house, contact

the Guide Dogs Association in your state or territory for a mobility assessment and advice. A mobility instructor can visit you in your home and give advice and training about common challenges such as stairs, public transport, crossing roads and finding your way to different places. These contact numbers are contained in the MD Foundation's *Low Vision - A Guide*. Contact the MD Foundation on 1800 111 709 for a free copy of this publication.

Top 10 Tips for No Trips**

1. It is important that you know your own strengths and weaknesses. A good way to find this out is to have a Low Vision Assessment.
2. Reduce your risk of falling by wearing shoes that are suitable for what you are doing. Other falls reduction strategies include not having mats in your house.
3. Modify your environment where possible to reduce falls risks. Paint a contrasting non-slip strip on the front edge of your steps.
4. Attend a Falls Reduction program in your area to learn how you can increase your safety when walking.
5. Reduce glare by wearing sunglasses and a hat when you are outside. Choose sunglasses that cut out glare or UV light. Using different light bulbs in your home may also help reduce glare.
6. Develop strategies to cope with changing light conditions. Place a chair near the back door so when you come in from outside you have somewhere to wait until your eyes adjust to the light.
7. Don't rush. Always allow yourself plenty of time to get to your destination.
8. Plan ahead. Get your coins or bus pass ready before the bus arrives so you don't need to hurry.
9. Cross the road safely. This may be at traffic lights where there is a defined break in traffic. Make sure you cross where you can see and be seen by oncoming traffic.
10. Think about where you sit. Do not sit facing into the light. Move your favourite chair so that light comes from behind.

Buying a Mobile Phone

Always shop around for mobile phones and try them out to find the one that you find easiest to use. If you have low vision, there are certain features to look for which will make the phone easier to use:



- **Buttons** - Look for a phone with large buttons that make a noise when pressed. Ensure buttons have good contrast and clear print
- **Screen** - Phones with colour screens tend to offer better contrast. A large font feature makes messaging and searching for contacts easier
- **Memory** - Check that frequently used and emergency numbers can be stored and accessed by pressing only one or two buttons on the phone
- **Style** - A flip-cover phone is a good idea as it opens to answer and closes to hang up, avoiding difficult on/off processes
- **Size** - Make sure the phone is not too small to hold or to find in your bag or pocket

Software is also available for some mobile phones and includes features such as speech output and magnification.

The most important thing is to make sure you are comfortable with using the phone and that it is practical for your lifestyle and level of vision.

Important Reminder

If ever you have a fall, make sure you let your doctor know, even if you feel okay.

Depression and MD

People with vision loss are three times more likely to experience depression than the general population. Depression is more than just a low mood - it is a serious illness and is not a normal part of ageing. Everyone experiences symptoms of depression from time to time, but when the symptoms are severe and lasting, it's time to get professional help. Depression is treatable and effective treatments are available.

COTA and *beyondblue* are currently running information sessions for older people to increase their awareness of depression and where to go for help.

To find out more information, visit *beyondblue* at www.beyondblue.org.au or call Lifeline on 1300 224 636.

The Benefits of Exercise

Exercising regularly and controlling your weight are good for your overall health.



Many gyms and fitness centres have programs which are targeted to seniors and help improve strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Council On The Ageing (COTA) runs specialised exercise programs in each state and territory specifically for seniors. It is a great way to get fit, exercise and meet new people. Contact COTA in your state or territory to find out more about their exercise programs.

Any changes to diet or lifestyle (including exercise) should be undertaken in consultation with your doctor.

Contact Us

Suite 302, Level 3, 447 Kent Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Helpline 1800 111 709 **Tel** 02 9261 8900

Email info@mdfoundation.com.au

Website www.mdfoundation.com.au

Volunteering

If you would like to become a volunteer and help in our Sydney office, please phone the Foundation on 1800 111 709. The MD Foundation thanks all volunteers who give their time to help the Foundation service the needs of the MD community throughout Australia.

Donate to the Foundation

As a charity, the MD Foundation relies on donations, bequests and sponsorship to fund its operations. A donation slip and reply paid envelope is included with this newsletter for your convenience.

An easier and quicker option is available by calling the Foundation to make a credit card donation. All donations over \$2 are tax deductible.

The MD Foundation would like to say a big thank you to all who have donated so far in 2007.

Education

The MD Foundation's education tour is coming to:

Western Australia

18 - 22 June 2007

NSW - Far West

20 - 21 June 2007

Call the Foundation for more information.

Reminder

All donations over \$2 made to the Foundation before the 30 June 2007 are tax deductible in the 2006/07 financial year.



Have your own Education Session!

If you would like an Educator from the MD Foundation to speak at an upcoming meeting of your NSW group or organisation and you are located in Sydney and surrounds - as far as Newcastle in the North, Wollongong in the South and Katoomba in the West please contact the Foundation on 1800 111 709.

NLAP Update

Thank you to everyone in NSW who sent in an Expression of Interest form for the Navigator Library Access Project (NLAP). The Foundation welcomed the enthusiastic response from over 600 people from all over NSW. The Client Services Officer is currently matching up people to interested libraries and will notify you as soon as possible if your local library is able to partner with the Foundation to deliver this exciting new project.

The MD Foundation thanks Rowena Jones, an Occupational Therapist from the Independent Living Services at Vision Australia, for her help in writing the article "What is an Occupational Therapist?"