Managing eye health and vision loss in residential aged care facilities

A resource for care workers on how to care for residents who are blind or have poor vision
Caring for people who are blind or have poor vision

Vision loss
Many people you care for will have poor vision and some may even be blind. Many older people can lose their central vision and have difficulty seeing straight ahead, but they can often still see some things using their side vision. While side vision does not provide any detail, it is usually good enough to see a doorway or if there is someone in the room, even if they can’t tell who that person is.

Other people can have quite good central vision, but poor side vision. These people might have difficulty seeing someone walking towards them from the side.

Some people can have a vision problem which makes everything look very cloudy - like looking through a thick fog. Other people can have a vision problem which makes their vision patchy – where some areas of their vision are blurred or missing or incomplete.

REMEMBER: People with vision loss can have poor central vision, poor side vision, patchy vision or very cloudy vision.

Impact of vision loss
People with poor central vision often have difficulty reading, watching TV, seeing faces, the meal or medication you place in front of them or anything that is small. People with poor vision also have difficulty seeing things like the edge of stairs, a low hanging tree branch, a rock on the ground or other hazards.

Many older people with poor vision don’t actually realise that their vision is poor. Others don’t want to make a fuss, so they won’t tell you they can’t see things properly.

REMEMBER: Loss of vision can have a major impact on daily life and independence.

Identifying a person with vision loss
It can be difficult to identify people with vision loss. There are signs which may indicate that a person isn’t seeing well. They might:

- fall or trip frequently
- hold a book or newspaper very close to their face
- not look straight at you – they might look slightly to the side of your face
- not want to join in group activities especially if these involve reading, playing bingo, Scrabble or cards
- not want to go for a walk, even though they are quite fit
- have reduced care with personal grooming
- be frustrated, angry, anxious or depressed

REMEMBER: Check for signs that a person may have vision loss.

If you think a person in your care is experiencing loss of vision, discuss with your Line Manager about changing the way care is provided to help keep them safe.
The Do’s and Don’ts of caring for people with vision loss

People with vision loss should be encouraged to be as independent as possible. However, some will require special care to make their lives happier and safer.

Here are some Do’s & Don’ts of caring for people with vision loss:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do’s ✓</th>
<th>Don’ts X</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Identifying yourself</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Always identify yourself when approaching someone with vision loss. You can lightly touch their arm or address them by name so they know you are talking to them.</td>
<td>Don’t assume that a person will know who you are when you start talking to them. Always identify yourself and tell them who you are.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Remember to let them know when you are walking away from them or have left the room.</td>
<td>Don’t walk away without letting them know as they may not realise and might start talking to you thinking that you are still there.</td>
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<td><strong>Assisting</strong></td>
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<td>Always ask before assisting or initiating care.</td>
<td>Don’t start assisting or caring for someone without asking them first. Remember, not everyone who is blind or has poor vision will need or want assistance in performing daily tasks.</td>
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<td><strong>Guiding and walking</strong></td>
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<td>Encourage walking or other forms of light exercise and check if supervision or aids are required.</td>
<td>Don’t place people in wheelchairs if they can still walk, even if they cannot see well.</td>
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<td>If a person needs guidance with walking, you can touch the back of their hand with the back of your hand. This helps them know exactly where you are standing. If you are on their right side, you can touch their right hand with your left hand. Offer your arm to guide them. They can hold your arm just above the elbow. You stand in front and lead, walking at a pace that is comfortable for both of you.</td>
<td>Don’t forget to look for obstacles at foot level, head height and to the sides and warn the person in advance.</td>
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<td><strong>Medication</strong></td>
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<td>You can help a person take their medication by placing it in their hand, handing them a glass of water and watch them safely swallow.</td>
<td>Don’t leave medication in a container as the person may not see them and accidently knock them over.</td>
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<td><strong>Hazards</strong></td>
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<td>In consultation with the person, remove trip hazards in the room such as power cords, rugs and other items.</td>
<td>Don’t ignore items that could unintentionally cause a fall for someone with poor vision.</td>
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## Do’s ✓

### Keeping things tidy

Check that commonly used items such as reading glasses, tissues, TV remote, clothing, footwear etc are kept in the same place to assist a person to easily identify and locate items when alone.

### Meal times

Tell the person when you are placing a meal in front of them and explain what the meal is. It is useful to describe the location of where you have placed their food or drinks. Use plates and cups with contrasting colour to the table surface/table cloth.

Offer to help with putting milk, sugar or sweetener in tea or coffee as it may be difficult for a person with poor vision to do this.

### Lighting

Most people with poor vision need extra lighting to read, do craft or look at photos. Place a lamp behind them so the light comes from over their shoulder.

### Glasses

If someone wears glasses, these should be easily identifiable and cleaned regularly. A useful tip is to keep a photo of the glasses or a photo of the person wearing their glasses in their top drawer so that you know and can check they are wearing the correct glasses. If they have multiple pairs of glasses, these may have to be labelled for better identification.

### Care plans

Alert your Line Manager if you think the person’s vision is worsening.

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## Don’ts X

### Keeping things tidy

Don’t change the location of personal items or move furniture in their room without asking - even it appears to be tidier or safer.

### Meal times

Don’t use clear glass water jugs or glasses and help by removing clear plastic food wrapping - as they are more difficult to see for people with severe vision loss.

Don’t fill cups too full – always let a person with poor vision know where you have placed their hot drink. This will avoid any unnecessary accidents.

### Lighting

Don’t face the person towards the window when they are watching TV as bright light from the window can be very glary.

### Glasses

Don’t forget when going outside sunglasses should be worn as glare can be uncomfortable and make their vision worse.

### Care plans

Don’t be afraid to ask for more information or go to: [www.mdfoundation.com.au](http://www.mdfoundation.com.au)