

LOW VISION: FYI



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A LOW VISION NEWSLETTER

Vitamins can help!

If you have been diagnosed with macular degeneration, you have probably been told to take eye vitamins.

Do they really work? Yes, it appears that they can help.

Ocular nutrients and their effects on slowing the progression of macular degeneration have been well studied. A major study funded by the National Eye Institute was called the "Age-Related Eye Disease Study" (AREDS). This study evaluated the effects of antioxidants and zinc on the progression of macular degeneration. This study revealed that the combination of antioxidants and zinc significantly reduce the risk of advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and its associated vision loss.

Currently AREDS-2 is underway. This study that will evaluate the benefits of lutein and zeaxanthin as well as omega-3 fatty acids on the progression to



advanced macular degeneration.

The formulation of antioxidants and zinc used in the AREDS study is currently available at most drug stores. Smokers and previous smokers should use a "smoker's formulation" in which the beta-carotene (Vitamin A) has been removed. You should always consult your eye care professional before beginning ocular vitamin therapy.

These vitamins are not a cure for macular degeneration, but they are a powerful tool in helping to prevent its progression. The AREDS study provides solid evidence that these vitamins do make a difference.

Dr. Paul Sieving, the director of the National Eye Institute, states: "The nutrients

are not a cure for AMD, nor will they restore vision already lost from the disease, but they will play a key role in helping people at high risk for developing advanced AMD keep their vision."

Yes, there's help available

"I couldn't believe how much I was helped."

That was the statement that Yvonne Beckley made before the 175 who attended this year's Low Vision Seminar. She was participating in the comments portion of the seminar which followed presentations by eye care professionals, and her words came out as powerful as any from the physicians.

Mrs. Beckley lives in Fernandina Beach and, at age 56, is afflicted with the "wet" form of

macular degeneration. Her retina doctor, Dr. Raul Moreno of the Florida Retina Institute, referred her to the Low Vision Center of Northeast Florida.

"She was quite depressed when she came because she didn't think there was anything that anyone could do," said Tiffany Owens, O.D., the low vision specialist at the center. "She had an assortment of vision devices and she didn't think that any really helped."

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"I want to see anything"

BY TIFFANY OWENS, O.D.

One of my favorite patients was a young gentleman, Mr. Jackson, who was referred to the Low Vision Center by his ophthalmologist. He had suffered severe and sudden vision loss only months earlier due to his uncontrolled diabetes. He had lost his job and his home. Mr. Jackson was terrified and he needed help. After our initial conversation, he was referred to the Division of Blind Services, and an appointment was made for a low vision examination.

When I first met Mr. Jackson, I escorted him to the exam room. He took each step with caution. He was a very quiet gentleman. I first inquired about his visual goals and he simply replied, 'I want to see anything.' When asked what was most important to him, he stated he wanted to read the Bible more than anything.

Mr. Jackson described a very "fuzzy and blotted" image in his right eye. He could not see the difference between light and dark with his left eye. I knew we had our work cut out for us.

After an initial screening of his eyes, it was obvious he had undergone several surgeries for his diabetic retinopathy. Additionally, he had no lens in his right eye - this is called aphakia. A trial frame refraction was performed and Mr. Jackson was found to be very highly farsighted. It was amazing to see his reaction looking through his new lens. His vision improved ten-fold with a standard pair of glasses. He was able to see my face for the first time.

To reach his goal of reading the Bible, we used his new prescription along with a lighted magnifier. Mr. Jackson was able to read the Bible with the combination of his new glasses and magnifier. He was so delighted. In fact, I sat and listened to him read for some time.

Mr. Jackson borrowed a pair of glasses until his new prescription was made. He walked with much more confidence as we left the exam room. Mr. Jackson's story shows the importance of a proper refraction and the determination of the appropriate magnification. It also shows that you should never give up on your dreams as anything is possible.

Getting devices

There are numerous devices available that can help those with low vision but, like any piece of sophisticated equipment, you need to have the right "fit." Thus, don't buy something "off the shelf." See a low vision specialist for a proper fit!

HELP AVAILABLE (continued from page 1)

After a full examination, Dr. Owens was able to determine the proper devices she needed. The center's therapist, Kim Rigdon, showed Mrs. Beckley how to use the devices and maximize their abilities to help with low vision.

Today, she's seeing well enough to live a normal life. She's getting more instruction from the Independent Living for Adult Blind program at

Florida Community College at Jacksonville and the Florida Division of Blind Services is also there to assist.

"It shows how a person's life can be positively affected by the proper medical care," said Dr. Owens. "I see patients every day who don't feel their vision can be improved; in most cases, it certainly can."

LOW VISION RESOURCES

BLINDED VETERANS ASSOCIATION: 291-0576

The organization assists veterans who are visually impaired.

BROOKS HEALTH SYSTEM: 858-7242

Is it time that your vision is impairing your ability to be a safe driver? This is a program to evaluate driver safety; the instructor accompanies the subject in a close course driving test. (Note: there is a fee for this service.)

CLAY COUNCIL OF THE BLIND: 264-5095

This is the local chapter of the National American Council of the Blind.

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:

232-2751, EXT. 3015

A resource for eligible veterans, the service is designed to ensure that veterans are brought into contact with the various services which can help the individual overcome the effects of blindness.

DIVISION OF BLIND SERVICES: 348-2730

The state agency that provides or arranges for a variety of vision rehabilitation services.

DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOLS: 390-2940

The Teachers of the Visually Impaired program provides educational services to visually impaired children from birth through age 22.

DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOLS: 858-1950

The system provides vision services and screenings for children Pre-K through 6th, and then 11th grade.

EYE RESEARCH FOUNDATION: 465-6065

This is a non-profit organization dedicated to education, research and treatment in the vision field.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR ADULT BLIND:
633-8307**

A division of Florida Community College at Jacksonville, ILAB provides vision rehabilitation training at no cost to the client through state and local funding.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING RESOURCE CENTER:
399-8484**

A non-profit that provides programs and services for people with significant disabilities.

**JACKSONVILLE COUNCIL OF THE BLIND:
348-2730**

A non-profit that provides advocacy, networking and support.

**LOW VISION CENTER OF NORTHEAST FLORIDA:
389-9989**

The center is a non-profit operation that provides low vision treatment.

**NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND:
292-2871**

An activist organization that assists people with low vision.

NEMOURS CHILDREN'S CLINIC: 390-3640

The clinic has a department dedicated to pediatric ophthalmology.

**RECORDING FOR THE BLIND AND DYSLEXIC:
296-9953**

An educational library for the print disabled.

SOUTHEASTERN GUIDE DOGS: 266-4011

Information on obtaining a guide dog.

**TEMPLE SISTERHOOD BRAILLE GROUP:
733-7078**

These are volunteers who produce Braille.

VISION IS PRICELESS COUNCIL: 308-2020

The VIP Council provides vision screenings for children at various schools as well as adult screenings at health fairs.

WJCT RADIO READING NETWORK: 358-6308

The station broadcasts national, regional and local news in addition to other vital information to people of Northeast Florida and Southeast Georgia.

Vision aids

BY TIFFANY OWENS, O.D.

When discussing low vision aids, it is important to note that everyone is unique, so the devices reviewed may not meet your specific goals.

Ocutech - Vision Enhancing Systems

The Ocutech is a monocular telescope mounting to the top of your eyeglasses. These devices have been around for quite a long time, - however, more recently the VES Sport was introduced. This device comes in a 4X or 6X power and can be mounted over the right or the left eye. The 4X telescope provides a 12.5 degree field of view, whereas the 6X provides a 9.6 degree field of view. This is wider than the equivalent powered Designs for Vision telescopes.

The benefit of using this device over a standard monocular telescope is that it is hands-free. We have found that this is very beneficial for students while sitting in the classroom. The Ocutech gives the ability to continuously



Dr. Owens with a patient.

view the chalkboard or a projection screen without having to hold a monocular. Of course this may be used for any task that requires distance viewing. Because the telescopic system is mounted above the line of sight, it provides the option of mobility.

Overall, the VES Sport is a useful device for magnification of distance tasks. It is especially useful if a hands-free option is desired.

How To Visit the Center

Every patient who comes to the Low Vision Center is referred by an eye care professional. Vision doctors throughout the area have the necessary forms.

The procedure is simple. When you get a referral form, simply call the Low Vision Center's patient care coordinator, Marsha Dowell, at 389-9989. She'll handle all the details.

The typical patient visits the Center twice. The first visit consists of an examination by our low vision specialist, Dr. Tiffany Owens, and a session with the center's therapist, Kim Rigdon. The visit will last about two hours; companions of the patient can relax in our waiting area where coffee and reading materials are available.

The second visit is a follow-up, primarily to insure that the patient is following recommended procedures.

After the visits, a report is filed to the referring eye care professional.



The 3 B's

let's talk about BIGGER

BY KIM RIGDON, CLVT

There are three important rules of low vision and we discuss them with every patient that we see at the Low Vision Center.

They are called the 3 B's.

Bigger.

Brighter.

Bolder.

Let's discuss the first B - Bigger. The majority of the patients that we see in our office have macular degeneration. Most people know that it can cause blind spots (scotomas) in the center of their vision. Blind spots can block out a word or even several words when reading small print.

By making print bigger, we hope to make the words large enough that the blind spot only covers part of a letter or word instead of the whole word.

Obviously, we can make words bigger by writing them larger or printing them on a computer larger and also by using a magnifier to make words appear larger.



Kim Rigdon assists a patient.

Magnification can come in many formats: glasses, hand held magnifiers, stand magnifiers, video magnifiers and telescopes are all different forms of magnification. Everyone who comes to the Low Vision Center asks for a large strong magnifier the size of the page and although a page-sized magnifier does exist, it doesn't work for many people.

In general when using glasses, hand-held and stand magnifiers, there are some basic principles:

1. The stronger the magnifier, the smaller the size of the lens.
2. The stronger the magnifier, the closer you have to hold the reading material to your eyes.
3. Magnifiers can come with or without lights on them.
4. Hand-held magnifiers should be used with distance glasses unless they are above a certain power and then they require a bifocal to focus.
5. Stand magnifiers are pre-focused, so they require the use of a bifocal to focus.

So, based on the principles mentioned above, a page-sized magnifier is not very strong. Most page magnifiers have a ridged appearance, which can inhibit a clear image for many people.

To find the best strength and type of magnifier, it is always a good idea to see a Low Vision Specialist. Low Vision Specialists start by making sure you have the best eyeglasses you can and then show you a variety of formats in the right power to make things appear large enough for your vision.

Low Vision Seminar

The 14th annual Low Vision Seminar was a big success ... except for the weather!

The seminar, which is sponsored each year by the Eye Research Foundation, was on March 2, the day that most of the area was under a tornado warning, but over 200 came to Jacksonville's Wyndham Hotel to hear Alabama low vision specialist Dr. Joseph Fontenot, Low Vision Center director Dr.

Tiffany Owens and Eye Research Foundation President Dr. W. J. "Jerry" Knauer III.

Dr. Fontenot was the featured speaker and told of his experiences battling macular degeneration. He was trained as a cardiologist but, when he was no longer able to practice, went back to school to train in low vision and is now director of a large center in the Mobile area.

The Low Vision Center is underwritten by the Eye Research Foundation of Jacksonville.

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This is a quarterly publication of the Low Vision Center of Northeast Florida, a non-profit clinic at 2519 Riverside Ave., Jacksonville, Florida 32204.

More information about the center is available by calling 389-9989.