Blindness PDF

According to the American foundation for the Blind, Legal blindness refers to the level of vision loss that has been legally defined to determine eligibility for benefits. The clinical diagnosis refers to a central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, and/or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Often, people who are diagnosed with legal blindness still have some useable vision. On the other hand, Low vision is often used interchangeably with visual impairment and refers to a loss of vision that may be severe enough to hinder an individual's ability to complete daily activities such as reading, cooking, or walking outside safely, while still retaining some degree of useable vision. Therefore,Total blindness refers to an inability to see anything with either eye, and a Visual impairment isn defined clinically as a visual acuity of 20/70 or worse in the better eye with best correction, or a total field loss of 140 degrees. Additional factors influencing visual impairment might be contrast sensitivity, light sensitivity, glare sensitivity, and light/dark adaptation.

Myths and misconceptions from South king Council for the Blind

1. Blindness is a tragedy. For people who suffer from blindness, life has lost all meaning.

2. People who are blind or visually impaired are mentally slow or less informed.

Response: With proper training and opportunity, the average person who is blind or visually impaired can compete in terms of equality with the average person who is sighted. In other words, the person who is blind or visually impaired can be as happy and lead as full a life as anybody else.

3. People who are blind or visually impaired are helpless and require supervision in their daily activities for safety's sake.

Response: The blind are much more independent than others give them credit for. Many are mobile and independent. Many view their blindness as a mere physical nuisance and not a disability. Again, good training makes the difference.

4. Being blind means having no vision at all.

Response: The majority of people who are considered blind have some sight, rather than no sight at all. That is, they have some residual vision, whether it is light perception, color perception, or form perception. Some legally blind people have enough central acuity left to read large print.

5. A person's other senses become more acute after the onset of blindness.

6. People who are blind or visually impaired have "super" hearing.

Response: Blind people are just like everyone else. With good training, they learn to pay attention to their other senses. Some blind people also experience hearing loss. Some have a poor sense of balance or tactile feel because of MS or diabetes.

7. People who are blind or visually impaired often possess a sixth sense and are psychic or able to foresee the future.

Response: If you believe this, blind people see bad things ahead for you.

8. All blind people are musically gifted.

Response: Sure, and all blind people know Stevie Wonder personally and see bad things ahead for you.

9. All people who are blind or visually impaired know braille.

Response: Only about 5 percent of people who are blind use braille. Most use large print, magnification, "talking" devices, and volunteer readers. There is a braille revival going on, because braille is the best way for kids to learn grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

10. All blind people get a guide dog.

Response: Not all blind people like dogs or want to care for an animal. Blind people need good travel skills before being trained to work with a dog guide. The dog responds to simple commands, but doesn't know when it's time to cross an intersection.

11. All people who are blind or visually impaired use a cane.

Response: Less than 2 percent of Americans who are blind or visually impaired use a cane for orientation and mobility.

12. All people who are blind or visually impaired wear dark glasses.

Response: The need for any type of low vision aid (e.g. glasses, magnifier, etc.) is contingent upon the individual situation and preferences of the person who is blind or visually impaired. The reason to wear sunglasses may be cosmetic or the person may be extremely sensitive to light.

Myths about Blindness and Visual Impairments

from Wisconsen Department of Health Services

Myth #1: Babies can see at birth.

We are born without anatomically developed eyes! Our vision at birth is by no means fully developed. Newborn babies see little more than the difference between light and dark. We all must learn to see, just as we learn to talk. The learning process takes place gradually from birth and is completed before age 6.

Myth #2: Children should have the first eye examination when they enter the first grade.

Every child's eyes should be examined by a medical doctor by age 3. If no problems are noted, the next exam should be around age 6. If the physician does detect any problems that might interfere with the child's learning, the difficulty may be corrected at a young age, allowing the child's vision to develop normally.

Myth #3: If you cannot see well in the dark, you have night blindness, which is a common problem.

Night blindness is not at all common. Night blindness can be a symptom of an eye disease called retinitis pigmemtosa and should be checked out by an eye doctor. Most people have more trouble seeing at night simply because it is harder to see when there is less light.

Myth #4: You should eat carrots because they improve your ability to see in the dark.

Supplementing your diet with vitamin A, which has been linked to eye health and is found in carrots, will not necessarily improve your vision.

Myth #5: People who are colorblind see only in black and white.

Persons who are colorblind perceive colors less vividly than the normal seeing person. Their world is rarely monochromatic.

Myth #6: Cataracts can be surgically removed only when they are ripe.

Cataracts, unlike a tomato, do not "ripen." Cataracts can remain stable or get progressively worse (more opaque). Surgery is performed when the patient's vision is so impaired that it interferes with activities of daily life.

Myth #7: You can tell if you have glaucoma because you will experience eye pain, see halos around lights, have excessive tearing, or your eyes will bother you in some way.

One type of glaucoma is painful. The most common type, however, causes no pain at all and is usually without symptoms until the disease is far advanced.

Myth #8: Sitting too close to the television or movie screen is bad for your eyes.

You cannot injure your eyes in any way by sitting close to the television or movie screen. Sit where you feel the most comfortable.

Myth #9: If you read or do a lot of close work, you will ruin your eyes and make yourself need glasses.

Optical errors are never caused by reading or any other heavy visual demand. The causes of the refractive errors are in the workings of the eye. People who read a lot may be more aware of possible refraction errors. Symptoms such as eyestrain and headaches may appear. The presence of the symptoms usually motivates the person to seek correction with lenses (glasses).

Myth #10: Cheap sunglasses are bad for your eyes.

Good sunglasses are recommended because they usually have sturdier frames and higher quality lenses that filter out harmful infrared or ultraviolet light. However, inexpensive sunglasses won't necessarily injure your eyes.

Myth #11: Individuals who are blind have a sixth sense or extra ordinary talents.

Usually a combination of hard work and the development of a good memory will permit people experiencing a vision loss to function very well. The "sixth sense" is a poetic phrase having no foundation or truth.

Myth #12: People who are blind or visually impaired are always in total darkness, seeing nothing at all.

Only about 15% of the visually impaired population "see" only total darkness. The majority of individuals who are visually impaired have some residual vision, whether it is light perception, color perception, or form perception.

Myth #13: Students who are blind or visually impaired shouldn't participate in physical activities for fear of losing their remaining sight or because they can't see what they are doing to participate.

Physical limitations should be determined by a medical examination. However, physical education and recreational activities need to be encouraged for everyone. The activities improve motor skills, coordination, and visual and auditory perceptual skills. Most physical activity can be easily adapted to allow an individual who is visually impaired to participate.

Myth #14: An individual's functional vision can fluctuate from day to day or during different hours of the day.

Depending on the cause and prognosis of the eye disorder, usable vision can vary from day to day or hour to hour. Teachers and caregivers should take note of the times of day, lighting conditions, weather conditions, etc. to help the individual assess his vision changes.

Myth #15: All individuals who are visually impaired wear some form of corrective lenses.

Glasses cannot correct all visual impairments. The need for lenses is dependent upon the diagnosis of the eye problems, the age of the patient, and the individual needs of the patient.

Myth #16: Large print books enable all visually impaired persons to see better.

Many visually impaired persons are able to read regular-sized print books. Large print books, however, have print that is larger than standard books and allow persons who have difficulty reading smaller print to more easily see the words on the page.

Myth #17: A dog guide knows where to go and how to get there without the master telling him.

Dog guides are trained from about one year of age to respond to traffic, street travel, and the commands the master gives. The individual who is visually impaired, before using a dog guide, goes through extensive and intensive training on how to use the dog. It is the master who knows where they are going, not the dog.

Blindness and Low Vision from the National Foundation of the Blind

FACT SHEET

It is estimated that about 1.3 million people in the U.S. are legally blind. Legal blindness refers to central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in the better eye with the best possible correction, or a visual field of 20 degrees or less.

Each year 75,000 more people in the United States will become blind or visually impaired.

It is estimated that as many as 10 million Americans are blind or visually impaired.

There are 5.5 million seniors in the United States who are either blind or visually impaired.

Studies show that over the next 30 years aging baby boomers will double the current number of blind or visually impaired Americans.

A Gallup poll shows that blindness is the third most feared physical condition in our nation, surpassed only by fears of cancer and AIDS.

Just 1% of the blind population is born without sight. The vast majority of blind people lose their vision later in life because of macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetes.

With macular degeneration, central vision deteriorates, resulting in blurred vision and eventually leading to blindness. Glaucoma causes damage to the optic nerve through pressure, compromising peripheral vision first. Diabetic retinopathy is a complication of diabetes that occurs when diabetes damages the tiny blood vessels inside the retina. While there are treatments to delay these conditions, there is no cure.

Macular degeneration affects about 13 million Americans.

Among working-age blind adults 70% remain unemployed, despite the federal and state annual rehabilitation expenditures of over $250 million.

There are 93,600 blind or visually impaired school age children in the U.S.

Nonvisual access to computer technology is an ever-increasing challenge for the blind. Most educational and employment opportunities are now and will continue to be dependent on the blind individual's ability to access and use a full range of computer and Internet technology.

Facts, figures and definitions concerning blindness and sight loss

Statistics from Eurpean Blind Union

There are estimated to be over 30 million blind and partially sighted persons in geographical Europe (see details).

An average of 1 in 30 Europeans experience sight loss.

There are four times as many partially sighted persons as blind persons.

The average unemployment rate of blind and partially sighted persons of working age is over 75 percent.

More women are unemployed than men.

Women are more at risk of becoming blind or partially sighted than men.

Sight loss is closely related to old age.

One in three senior citizens over 65 faces sight loss. 90 percent of visually impaired persons is over the age of 65

Causes of sight loss

Some people are born with reduced sight whilst others may acquire an eye condition later in life, such as retinitis pigmentosa that deteriorates with age. Others may lose their sight in an accident, or because of a disease like diabetes or arthritis.

Age-related eye conditions are the most common cause of sight loss in Europe. Eyesight in seniors may be affected by conditions such as macular degeneration or cataracts.

In the poorer countries of the world millions of people suffer sight loss caused by preventable diseases. These types of vision loss are called ‘preventable blindness'.

More information is available in the publications section.

Definitions

The definitions of blindness and partial sight, as well as the registration criteria vary from one European country to another.

EBU adopts in principle the definitions (External link) used by the World Health Organisation (WHO) for blindness and partial sight. At the same time EBU advocates the importance of using the so called 'functional sight' parameters in addition to the WHO definitions when determining the support a blind or partially sighted person needs.

The term ‘visual impaired' is used to indicate blind plus partially sighted people together.

Partially sighted and low vision are used as equal indication of limited sight.

Other criteria generally used by ophtalmologists:

A person can register as blind if they can only read the top letter of the optician's eye chart from three metres or less.

A person can register as partially sighted if they can only read the top letter of the chart from six metres or less.

Deafblindness (External link) is a condition that combines in varying degrees both hearing and sight loss. Two sensory impairments multiply and intensify the impact of each, creating a severe disability with a high risk of isolation and exclusion. Deafblindness is different and therefore requires specific actions and solutions.

Living with sight loss

People with sight loss are from all walks of life, have different backgrounds, education and social status. The way in which each individual is affected, is highly unique and can be a totally difference experience from one person to the other. Support, rehabilitation, social benefit system are some of the factors that make coping with sight loss easier.

A common misconception is that blind persons cannot see anything at all. This is of course true for some, while many have some perception of light and shadow, see everything in a vague blur, have tunnel vision, or lack central vision. There are many different eye conditions and they all produce a different form of vision distortion.

Details concerning statistical information

The World Health Organisation estimates, in figures dating from 2010, that in Europe there are

2,550,000 blind people and

23,800,000 low vision people, giving a total of

26,350,000 visually impaired individuals.

This information and further data is available on the WHO website (External link)

EBU tends towards an estimate of 30,000,000 visually impaired individuals. This higher figure takes into account the prevalence of sight-loss amongst an increasing population of elderly people in Europe which is extremely difficult to accurately quantify, and also the fact that there exists a number of people who suffer from varying degrees of sight loss but who either ignore this or decide for personal reasons not to declare their condition.