

Legal Blindness

Normal vision, or 20/20 vision, means that a person can read the smallest letters or see the pictures on an eye chart when standing 20 feet away from the chart. Some people cannot see normally even with eyeglasses or contacts because a medical condition affects their vision. These people are called visually impaired or visually disabled.

If a visual impairment limits vision to 20/200, or one-tenth of normal vision, a person is considered **legally blind**. Being legally blind, however, does not mean a person is totally unable to see. People with 20/20 vision but less than 20 degrees of side (peripheral) vision can also qualify as legally blind. People who see well with only one eye are not considered legally blind, nor are people who wear glasses to see better than 20/200.

Most legally blind people function quite well, especially if they have been visually impaired since childhood. Older children and adults with visual impairments may need magnifying lenses for reading and telescopes for distance viewing. People with very poor vision may need to learn Braille and walk with a seeing-eye dog or a cane.

Young children with visual disabilities should have help from a teacher of the visually impaired and should be evaluated for developmental problems by professionals experienced with visual impairments. Parents may need to be advocates for their children to obtain needed services through the school system.

Visually impaired people of all ages benefit from social service, occupational therapy, and orientation and mobility training. Many new devices are available to help them cope with vision loss, including books on audiotape, scanners that can turn print into Braille, watches that can be “read” with the fingers, and “talking” computers and calculators.

This information is provided by the American Academy of Ophthalmology.