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Single Eye Vision

Advice for adapting to single eye vision

The loss of vision in one eye, whether for 24 hours (such as wearing an eye pad) or more permanently, can be very difficult to come to terms with. You will find though, that in a very short period of time you will begin to adapt and the frustrations you encounter in the first weeks can be overcome with patience and persistence.

The advice outlined below will help you do this.

What happens when I lose the vision in one eye?

Because the sight in each eye covers the same field of vision to some extent, when you lose the ability to see in one eye you do not lose half of your sight. Rather, your overall visual field is reduced by about 30%, which might not be as bad as you first thought.

The main thing that you will notice is the loss of depth perception. This is most obvious at a range of approximately 1 to 2 metres away but it will affect your near perception also, and is the thing that will cause the most frustration. At distances over 3 metres it is not so noticeable.

What sort of problems should I be aware of?

Most things will become instinctive as your brain adjusts to doing things in a slightly different way. But to begin with it is worth bearing in mind that some of the activities below might cause you some initial frustration and so there are some hints that may help in reducing this included in this leaflet.

When reaching for an object you may find you grab empty air.

Open your hand wide and move your arm forward slowly until you touch the object. This will become automatic over time so persistence will pay off.

Pouring into a glass, cup or mug can be tricky.

Touch the bottle, kettle, etc. to the rim of the glass or cup to locate its position before pouring as it's easy to spill. Be extra cautious with hot liquids.

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Be careful when walking

Go slowly at first, paying extra attention to the surface you are walking on as it will be harder to spot dips and bumps which may cause you to stumble. Take extra care getting on and off trains and buses. Be aware that your field of vision is not as wide as it used to be - it is easy to bump into lamp posts and other pedestrians.

Equally, be careful on stairs and kerbs

More attention and less speed works well, particularly with the first and last step of a flight of stairs. When you reach what you believe to be the last step, carefully dip your toe over the edge to check that it is a step because if the stair and floor surface are made of the same floor covering it is easy to make a mistake. When approaching a kerb, watch the kerb from a few feet before its edge and see how its position in relation to the road changes. This will give an indication of its height.

Finding things

It may sound peculiar but one of the most frustrating things is opening a drawer, say in the kitchen or any drawer that contains a lot of small items, and not being able to see what you are looking for. There is no height difference between items in the drawer so it becomes like a photograph and things are harder to find. Move some items out of the drawer to limit your choice. Also be careful when closing the drawer as you will not be able to tell if everything is lying flat enough to enable it to close.

Other tips

You may well find that you can still do most things that you did before your vision loss. Even activities that require close work can be done with the help of changing the angle or type of lighting, and extra focus and caution. Always be aware of safety such as closing cupboard doors, not leaving items on the floor and other obstacles that you may not always be able to see.

When eating out try and sit with your blind side next to a wall or pillar so you are prepared for approaching waiters to avoid possible accidents.

Sometimes if you wear spectacles, thinner rims may help improve your range of clear vision.

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Bouncing a tennis ball off a wall and trying to catch it is good for improving co-ordination and finding new clues to help with depth perception. Be warned, it does take a while to improve and involves a lot of exercise to retrieve the ball.

Protecting your good eye from risk of injury from things such as DIY or sport. Wearing protective goggles is strongly recommended.

Driving

In South Africa, the permanent loss of vision in one eye does not necessarily mean that you cannot drive. According to the National Traffic Act, 1996, Chapter V, Part II;102, the legal requirements are as follows:

Group 1: Cars, LMV's and motorcycles (code A1, A, B, EB)

Vision

- Vision of 6/12 (0.5) in both eyes, with or without glasses or contact lenses
- If one eye has vision of less than 6/12, the other eye must have a vision of 6/9 or better

Visual fields

- A minimum visual field of 70 degrees temporal in both eyes, with or without glasses or contact lenses
- If one eye has less than 70 degrees temporal vision, a minimum total horizontal visual field of at least 115 degrees

Group 2: Trucks, passenger, special (code C1, C, EC1 and EC)

Vision

- Vision of 6/9 in both eyes, with or without glasses or contact lenses

Visual fields

- A minimum visual field of 70 degrees temporal in both eyes, with or without glasses or contact lenses

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Developing monocular cues takes on average 3 months. **If you have lost or have decreased vision in one eye suddenly, you may not drive for this time period**, until your brain has adapted and you have developed monocular cues (depth perception with one eye). Some people take longer to develop these cues, and may require the assistance of a specialized optometrist to obtain this.

If you are able to drive again, the thought of getting behind the wheel after losing vision in one eye can be a daunting prospect. Do not rush to do too much at once but gradually increase the distance and types of driving that you do as you become more confident.

Most things that you want to do are achievable with one eye, but focus, patience, persistence and a sense of humour will certainly make it easier to get back to your normal way of life.