

## **How do I help a loved one who has vision loss following a stroke?**

Maintaining independence for persons following a stroke can be challenging. Many activities of daily living, such as reading, safe travel, eating, speaking and self-care, can seem difficult or nearly impossible.

The most common deficits following a stroke or CVA (cerebral vascular accident) include difficulties with visual function. These difficulties may include double vision, poor focusing for tasks such as reading, loss of depth perception, or a loss of visual field.

Vision problems after a stroke stem from damage to the brain or optic nerve, and can range from slight to severe. Vision loss often occurs along with other problems such as partial paralysis, memory, and speech problems.

The most notable loss of vision, hemianopia, occurs when patients lose vision in one side of their field of vision. Sometimes, patients can be totally unaware of this shortfall, bumping into walls or ignoring food on one side of their plate. This visual neglect is a perceptual loss of vision. The person is unaware of their sight or lack of sight on the affected side, and is unable to complete a visual picture based on seeing only some of the parts. This makes it difficult to recognize faces and environmental dangers that may put the person at risk for falls.

Only an experienced medical professional can definitively diagnose a stroke using various imaging tests. However, strokes have several characteristic symptoms, including sudden numbness or weakness (especially on one side of the face or body), sudden confusion or inability to speak or walk, and sudden vision changes. If you experience any of these symptoms, contact your doctor or emergency personnel immediately.

Due to the major impact of the visual system on cognitive and motor function, the vision rehabilitative needs of a person affected by a stroke must be addressed as early as possible. Early intervention

following a stroke is paramount to recovery of visual function and general well being. With proper care and rehabilitation, stroke patients have a chance to regain quality of life, return to work and perform daily activities that are necessary for independence.

The road to recovery should include a team of caring and skilled healthcare providers who specialize in stroke and low vision rehabilitation. Many deficits can be improved or resolved through diligent efforts and rehabilitation provided by a low vision rehabilitation specialist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, orientation and mobility specialist, and a certified driving rehabilitation specialist, if appropriate.

In most circumstances, lenses and prisms may result in elimination of double vision and prism lenses may assist in compensation of visual field loss. Magnification, contrast sensitivity, control of glare, and management of the visual field loss will also be addressed by a low vision specialist.

If a family member or loved one is affected by a stroke, you may be one of the most important people in their life. Share your knowledge of how rehabilitation can help them regain their independence.