

Vision loss - occupational therapy

Occupational therapists are health professionals trained to help people overcome their limitations so they can live more independent lives. Occupational therapy for children and adults with vision impairment aims to maximise existing skills and offer alternative, easier ways to do things. An occupational therapist can also suggest changes to the home and workplace, and training in the use of adaptive equipment.

Occupational therapy services offered by vision impairment organisations, such as Guide Dogs Victoria, are available for people of all ages and with all degrees of vision loss.

Practical changes at home and work

An occupational therapist may suggest a range of practical changes to the home and work environments for people with vision impairment. Such changes may include:

- Identification tags (colour-coded or tactile) fitted to equipment and items
- Increased lighting and use of contrast
- Aid equipment such as magnifiers and audio equipment – this includes training in the use of aids and equipment
- Removal of clutter that could pose a safety hazard – for example, items stored on the floor or on benches.

Occupational therapy programs are individually tailored

The Guide Dogs Victoria occupational therapy programs are offered free of charge, and can range in length from one day to several weeks. They can be performed at the training centre in Kew or in the person's home. Where appropriate, training is done together with family members and associated rehabilitation professionals.

Programs are goal focussed and are designed to meet the needs of each individual to learn new skills and strategies. These include:

- Daily living skills such as cooking, personal grooming and banking
- Life planning and goal setting, moving out of home, or starting a new job or leisure activity
- Providing guidance on socially appropriate behaviour and activity
- Assessing and providing age-appropriate skills training.

Initial assessment

The Guide Dogs Victoria program is designed to meet the person's individual goals. To help a person reach their maximum potential, their existing abilities are professionally assessed in the context of their work, school, home, leisure, general lifestyle and family situation.

Various assessments may be done including:

- **Sensory assessments** – to work out how the person uses their remaining vision and other senses
- **Motor assessments** – to define the person's strength, coordination, range of movement and dexterity.

These assessments also help to make sure that, for safety reasons, the new skills offered fall within the person's capability.

Training programs

Areas covered in training programs include:

- **Personal care skills** – showering, dressing, identifying clothes, grooming, shaving, applying make-up and managing medication
- **Domestic skills** – meal planning, cooking, laundry, cleaning and how to respond to emergencies
- **Community skills** – budgeting, banking, money handling and shopping
- **Communication skills** – telephone use, computer skills, reading and writing
- **Social skills** – learning to present oneself in a more confident manner, and learning how to listen for conversational cues
- **Personal wellbeing** – fitness and relaxation.

Mobility services for all ages

Occupational therapy can be offered together with a specialised range of mobility programs. Orientation and mobility instruction helps the vision-impaired individual to move confidently, safely and independently in their environments, including home, school, workplaces and the local neighbourhood. Mobility programs are offered to people of all ages on a one-on-one, group or consultancy basis.

A program may cover:

- **Self and sense** – understanding your own body and body movement
- **Thinking and problem solving** – how to use planning, memory and insight
- **Communication** – developing social skills, body language and verbal communication
- **Safety** – how to identify 'stranger danger' and ask for help
- **Exploration** – how to use all your senses and identify objects and places
- **Environments** – what to expect in different places such as the school, shops, employment and community services, such as the bank or chemist
- **Travel** – move purposefully from one place to another, including training on straight-line travel, timing and more
- **Traffic** – strategies for traffic including crossing the road, footpaths and curbs
- **Mobility aids** – using canes, monoculars and other aids.

Where to get help

- Australian Association of Occupational Therapists Tel. (03) 9415 2900.
- Guide Dogs Victoria – Referrals Officer Tel. (03) 9854 4467

Things to remember

- Occupational therapy for children and adults with vision impairment offers new strategies and alternative methods of completing activities of daily living.
- Orientation and mobility instruction helps the vision-impaired individual to move confidently, safely and independently in their environments.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Guide Dogs Victoria

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