

# 15 Tips for Family and Friends

Many family members and friends of people with ARMD have asked me what they can do to help. Here are 15 tips:

1. **BE DIRECT ABOUT YOUR VISION.**  
Ask questions so that you know. Don't worry about using phrases like "Did you see Zelda yesterday?"
2. **IDENTIFY YOURSELF AND SAY HELLO.**  
Don't assume that others can see you.
3. **GIVE CLEAR DIRECTIONS.**  
Say in words everything you want to convey. If you use arm and hand gestures to point, it won't be seen.
4. **USE BLACK FELT-TIP OR INK PENS AND PRINT IN CLEAR LETTERING.**  
Write notes so that they can be read. Consider calling instead.
5. **GIVE LOW-VISION GIFTS.**  
Some suggestions:
  - Talking calculators, watches, clocks, thermometers, weight scales or computer software.
  - Large-button or automatic-dialing telephones, large print cards, clocks, calendars, or address books.
  - Books on tape or tickets to a concert.
  - Create a fund to help purchase a CCTV.
6. **KEEP THE ENVIRONMENT PREDICTABLE.**  
Keep frequently-used items like house keys, salt shakers, and trash bags in designated places. Put things away after you use them and close cupboards and stairwell doors. Return any items you move back to the place where you found it.
7. **OFFER YOUR ARM; DO NOT TAKE THEIRS.**  
Don't take their arm because you may throw them off-balance. Offer help where it's necessary, but don't just do it yourself.

8. DON'T JUST DO FOR YOUR PARENT.

Don't assume that because of low vision your parent isn't capable and don't take away anyone's reason for having to be up and about in the morning.

9. SHARE ACTIVITIES YOU BOTH ENJOY.

There are many practical things you can do to help someone follow a program of visual rehabilitation. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Help arrange the furniture, tape down area rugs, install new lighting fixtures, choose contrasting tablecloths or dishes.
- Help rearrange clothing on shelves for better visibility.
- Help label files, boxes, bottles, stove dials, washing machine dials, canned goods, and other foods.
- Talk directly to your friend or family member about his or her experiences and feelings about low vision.

10. ENCOURAGE INTERESTS.

Encourage hobbies, volunteer work, and membership in senior clubs or support groups, listening to National Public Radio news or to *Newsweek* on cassette tape. Just coping with low vision as a full-time preoccupation is a short-term recipe for boredom and a long-term recipe for personal distress and crisis.

11. REALIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF FRIENDS.

Without any friends, seniors are prone to loneliness, which may lead to clinical depression. Adult children would do their parents a great service by helping them make or keep friends.

12. WATCH FOR DEPRESSION.

Depression is very common among people with MD. Be aware of changes in your friends or family member's emotional state, sleeping patterns, weight or behavior. Signals for depression are excessive worry, bouts of crying, listlessness or disinterest, low motivation, pessimism or snippiness, social withdrawal, a refusal to communicate or an excessively stiff upper lip, moping, or helplessness. If you see signs of depression, make a doctor's appointment, pursue visual rehabilitation, and encourage involvement in new activities.

### 13. PARTICIPATE IN VISUAL REHABILITATION.

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### 14. HELP START A SUPPORT GROUP.

At a low vision support group, your friend or family member would have the chance to talk to people who have walked a mile in their shoes and can understand their experiences. They can also be very helpful for spouses of people with low vision.

### 15. KEEP YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR.

We are all prone to taking life too seriously. Let your friend or family member see the daily humor in this busy, unpredictable, ridiculous, profound, heartbreaking, and heartwarming experience we call living.

Condensed from "Macular Degeneration – the complete Guide to Saving and Maximizing Your Sight" by Lylas G. Mogk, M. D.

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## **NEW VISION FOR INDEPENDENCE, INC.**

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New Vision for Independence, Inc. is committed to excellence in providing rehabilitation, community education, and support services for people with low vision or blindness and their families to promote independence, acceptance, and self-confidence.