Combining the world-renowned expertise of UAB’s Schools of Medicine, Optometry, and Health Professions to provide comprehensive rehabilitative care for people with vision impairment.
The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation helps people with vision loss to make the most of their remaining vision and to cope with their vision impairment. A person is considered to have low vision when they are having functional difficulties because of their vision. This can occur at any visual acuity level. Visual acuity is simply a measure of how well a person sees high-contrast targets, and as such does not provide the most accurate picture of how they function visually in everyday life. We care for patients of all ages, from infants to the elderly. Most patients are referred to the center by their eye doctor, although referrals are welcome from any physician, as well as self-referral by the patient.
with macular degeneration, benefit from eccentric viewing training to learn to more efficiently use their peripheral or side vision. The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation is the only place in Alabama where we are able to measure visual function in real time as we observe the retina. The doctor uses this information to make recommendations for eccentric viewing training.

Magnifiers, telescopes and electronic magnification are prescribed to enable patients to meet their visual goals. Patients are more efficient in the use of these devices when they are appropriately prescribed, since too much or too little magnification can result in substantially poorer performance. The information collected during the history and examination is utilized by the low vision specialist not only to determine the appropriate type and amount of magnification but also the need for occupational therapy and psychology services.

PSYCHOLOGY SERVICES

Vision loss, especially when recent, can be difficult to cope with. In fact, it is common for patients with vision impairment to suffer from depression, frustration, or anxiety. Additionally, family members may also experience concerns related to a loved one's loss of vision and may benefit from education and treatment. A licensed clinical psychologist with specialty training in rehabilitation psychology provides diagnostic evaluations and treatment for patients and their family members. Treatment focuses on problem-solving training, which is a brief cognitive-behavioral therapy to teach patients to improve their problem-solving skills. Additionally, neuropsychological evaluations and interventions can assist patients who also have cognitive problems learn how to more effectively use coping strategies.

TECHNOLOGY CENTER

The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation houses a large collection of electronic magnification devices. The devices use video technology to magnify objects to much larger sizes than are possible with optical magnification. Electronic magnification also has the ability to enhance the contrast of printed items to make them easier to read. Magnification is variable, so that the patient can adjust the print size for their optimum visual comfort. The occupational therapist works with patients in the use of these devices to ensure maximum efficiency.
BIOPTIC TELESCOPES

The doctors and therapists of the UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation have extensive experience prescribing and providing training in the use of bioptic telescopes (at left). Bioptics are telescopes mounted in glasses that can be used for a variety of tasks, such as reading the board at school, watching television, or driving. States permitting bioptic driving—including Alabama—have very specific vision requirements to obtain a bioptic license; our doctors advise patients about their eligibility for bioptic driving.

RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The highest-quality medical care is often found at institutions where there are abundant research activities aimed at better understanding medical conditions and their treatment. The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation is no exception. Multiple clinical projects are underway at any given time. Patients of the center are often invited to participate in these projects, although participation is completely voluntary. All patients will receive the same high-quality rehabilitative care, regardless of their decision about participation in research studies.

HISTORY OF THE UAB CENTER FOR LOW VISION REHABILITATION

In early 2001 the Department of Ophthalmology in the School of Medicine and the School of Optometry began collaborating to establish a multidisciplinary low vision rehabilitation clinic. The concept was to bring together specialists from the UAB campus to meet the broad medical, psychosocial, and rehabilitative needs of people with vision impairment.

Faculty members from Ophthalmology, Optometry, Occupational Therapy, Psychology, and Special Education were brought together to formalize the concept of the UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation. The group was able to successfully obtain support from the EyeSight Foundation of Alabama, the UAB Health Services Foundation, the UAB Provost's Office, and the Helen Keller Foundation to start the center.

The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation was dedicated in February 2002, and it has served thousands of patients since then. The reputation of the center has continued to grow, and it is known nationally for the multidisciplinary care rendered there.
LOW VISION EVALUATION

The low vision evaluation is the entry point into the UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation. Here the patient receives a comprehensive evaluation of their visual function. The evaluation is performed by an eye doctor with residency or fellowship training in vision rehabilitation. This evaluation is very different from an eye health examination, in that the focus is VISION. The low-vision evaluation begins with an extensive history that includes not only the patient’s health conditions, but also uses validated surveys to screen for the need for other rehabilitation services as well as to determine the visual difficulties encountered by each individual patient related to their vision. Next, the visual capabilities of the patient are determined. Many patients who are no longer able to read the standard eye chart are relieved to see that they can still identify letters on our charts. Low-vision refractions are performed to ensure that the patient has the most appropriate glasses prescription. Although many patients have been told that new glasses won’t help, having the most appropriate prescription facilitates using vision-enhancement devices. Contrast sensitivity—the ability to see things when they are similar to their background—is measured, as is binocularity, or how well the eyes work together. Many patients who have lost their central vision, such as those

REHABILITATION TRAINING

Rehabilitation training is provided by occupational therapists with specialty certification in Low Vision Rehabilitation from the American Occupational Therapy Association. Occupational therapy can help people safely and independently complete day-to-day activities that are important to them. The therapist evaluates and assesses the patient’s ability to perform daily activities that may have been impacted by visual impairment. The following are some of the areas that may be addressed in occupational therapy:

- Increasing safety and visibility in the home.
- Learning to use remaining vision more efficiently.
- Training in the use of optical and non-optical aids.
- Teaching non-visual techniques to compensate for vision loss.
- Identifying and managing medications.
- Preparing meals safely.
- Paying bills and managing finances.
- Participating in leisure activities.

COMPREHENSIVE TREATMENT

The eyes are miraculous and complex; they cannot be replaced with a simple adaptive device. But patients can resume normal, independent, and productive lives despite vision impairment. Rehabilitation is a process that is highly individualized depending on each person’s unique needs. Patients may utilize some or all of the services available in the center. Many patients require multiple visits to the center to meet those needs. In order to help maximize the patient’s independence, treatment sessions can sometimes be provided in the home as well as in our clinic.
TRAVELING TO UAB

A special multiple-day program can be designed for you, to minimize the need for several trips to the center. Simply have your eye care provider fax your clinical records to us; we will review them and then call you to discuss your goals. We will then design a custom preliminary program for you and assist you in making overnight hotel reservations if needed. The program may be modified based upon the results of our testing, but we aim to make the most of your visit to the UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation.

PREPARING FOR YOUR VISIT

It is helpful for patients to think about the things that they are having difficulty with. This may include problems with reading, watching TV, getting around, playing cards, sewing, knitting, or working in the kitchen. Patients should consider the things they would like to see better and set goals for their rehabilitation. Any glasses, magnifiers, or other low-vision devices that are being used or that have been used in the past should be brought to the evaluation. Patients are also invited to bring any special materials such as forms, books, needlework, etc., that they wish to see better to the evaluation.

APPOINTMENT INFORMATION

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OUR LOCATION

The UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation is located on the fourth floor in Suite 405 of the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital at UAB. We have attached parking for our patients, which is discounted for those who get their parking tickets validated in the clinic. Enter the deck from University Blvd.

UAB Center for Low Vision Rehabilitation

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