Retina New Zealand Inc. would like to acknowledge the financial assistance from:

- NZ Lottery Grants Board
- Blind Foundation

We thank you for your support on this project and our other important peer support and public awareness projects.
Welcome to Your Blue Book.

Right now your eyesight might mean that you are experiencing difficulty with regular tasks around the home, are anxious about your current or future employment situation, uncertain about your personal relationships or feeling a degree of apprehension in social settings. It might be that you’re just simply not yet in the know, you don’t have all the knowledge.

Learning the knowledge is well-known in London as the process by which a taxicab driver is licensed. Prospective cabbies are given The Blue Book, which sets out many routes and the various points of interest along those routes, they must learn.

Retina New Zealand has written Your Blue Book with the intention of providing you with an opportunity to learn the knowledge that you will need as you set out on your path towards maintaining or restoring your independence and quality of life.

This is Your Blue Book. We hope it will help you access what you personally need. Information contained here will guide you (or your family member or friend) to understanding and dealing with your eye condition. We are confident this guide should start you on the journey of discovering how to do everything you did before, but in a different way.

Every person works through their sight loss differently. At Retina NZ we have found the following information to be most useful and we hope it will help you feel a renewed sense of freedom, independence and empowerment as you undertake this journey. We encourage you to regularly practice your new skills and to re-read Your Blue Book if you want to minimise the impact of sight loss on your lifestyle.

Retina New Zealand’s Peer Support Line will put you in touch with our team of caring, experienced and supportive listeners and advisors - ready to support you as you go about accessing your own points of interest. Peer Support is free for everyone. Whether you are a patient with questions, a support person seeking a better understanding, or just need a willing listener, please contact us (toll-free) on 0800 233 833.

With best wishes,
The Retina NZ team.
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1. The Professionals - Who can help you and how.

To help you with your diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation, below is some information about professionals who can help and how to access their services.

**Ophthalmologist**
A doctor of medicine qualified to diagnose, manage and treat all eye and visual system disorders. An Ophthalmologist is trained to render total eye care, including vision services, contact lenses, eye examinations, medical eye care and surgical eye care. You will find Ophthalmologists listed in the medical practitioner section of your telephone directory.

**Optometrist**
An eye health professional trained to provide primary eye care services, such as eye health & vision examinations, diagnosis of vision problems and eye diseases, prescribing of eyeglasses, contact lenses and medications. A full list of members of the NZ Association of Optometrists is available on their website: [www.nzao.co.nz](http://www.nzao.co.nz)

**Low Vision Specialist**
In New Zealand this is usually an Optometrist with knowledge and experience of the special needs of people with low vision.

These skilled professionals will first conduct a clinical low vision examination before assessing both your functional visual abilities and the environment in which you will operate. This includes everyday tasks that are important to you - things such as reading and writing, moving about, grooming, cooking and cleaning.

The important point is that you can set your own priorities. There will also be a more technical assessment to determine the correct amount of magnification required for different tasks, to assess the issues of glare and contrast sensitivity, and to enable recommendations of possible aids and appliances.

Information on locating a Low Vision Specialist is detailed in chapter 11 of this book (Making Contact - page 30).
Blind Foundation – Rehabilitation Instructors

If you qualify to receive services from the Blind Foundation, you will be able to access the services of Rehabilitation Instructors and other vital services free of charge.

Rehabilitation Instructors can help with:

• A variety of communication systems.
• Activities of daily living.
• Leisure and recreation skills.
• Psycho-social aspects of sight loss.
• Basic orientation and mobility.

Criteria for registration to receive Blind Foundation services is:

“In the opinion of a registered Ophthalmologist or Optometrist the person's visual acuity does not exceed 6/24 in the better eye with corrective lenses, or there are serious limitations in the field of vision generally not greater than 20 degrees in the widest diameter.”

If you do not qualify to receive full Blind Foundation services, you can access relevant services through the Vision Solutions unit. To find out more about the services available, what it costs, and what you need to do before you make an appointment, contact the Vision Solutions team on (09) 355 7139, by email info@visionsolutions.co.nz or telephone the Blind Foundation on 0800 24 33 33.
2. How do you make sense of your diagnosis?

To understand your diagnosis and the options available to you it is important to play an active role in your health care. You and your medical professional will work in partnership to achieve your best possible level of health. Here are some questions you can ask your Ophthalmologist or Optometrist (or other medical professional):

At the initial diagnosis of your condition:
- What kinds of tests will I have?
- What do you expect to find out from these tests?
- When will I know the results?
- Do I have to do anything special to prepare for any of the tests?
- Do these tests have any side effects or risks?

When a diagnosis has been made:
- What is my diagnosis?
- A description in layman's terms would be?
- What caused my condition?
- Can my condition be treated?
- How will this condition affect my vision now & in the future?
- Should I watch for any particular symptoms and notify you if they occur?
- Should I make any lifestyle changes?

Similarly, when discussing treatments:
- What is the treatment for my condition?
- When will the treatment start, and how long will it last?
- What are the benefits of this treatment, & how successful is it?
- What are the risks and side effects associated with this treatment?
- Are there foods, drugs, or activities I should avoid while I'm on this treatment?
- If my treatment includes taking a medication, what should I do if I miss a dose?
- Are there alternative treatments?
If you don't understand your doctor's responses, ask questions until you do understand. Take notes, or get a friend or family member to take notes for you. Alternatively, you could:

- Bring a recording device to assist in your recollection of the discussion.
- Ask your doctor to write down his or her instructions to you.
- Ask your doctor for printed material about your condition.

If you still have trouble understanding your doctor's answers, ask where you can go for more information.

Other members of your health care team, such as nurses and pharmacists, can be good sources of information. Talk to them, too.
3. Communication - making your thoughts and needs clear

Some good guiding principles are: cherish your independence; ask for things when you need them; gently and cheerfully remind people when they fail to be inclusive; mention your sight loss only as a fact of life - like anyone else might mention having kids or growing up on a farm.

The essence of good communication is balancing opportunities for helping and for receiving help. Knowing when to ask for help is a dilemma for most people - whether they have a disability or not. So you are in good company in this sense.

Consult your own understanding of the real impact of your sight loss and your own sense of fair play. Approach each and every task or responsibility by asking yourself:

• Can I do this myself?
• Is it really the other person's responsibility?
• Am I asking for something unrealistic?
• Am I giving as well as I'm getting?

Carefully consider who might be most appropriate to ask for help. If the help you receive is inappropriate for any reason, don't make the helper feel bad. Ask the helper again, reminding them what it is you're trying to achieve, or ask another person you explain what you need.

Importantly, remember concise and unambiguous requests are best. Don't make people guess what you want or need. Be forgiving if you do ask and they forget your request. It happens. We have to be aware of, as well as accept, our limitations and strengths and we need the confidence to be able to share that information with anyone at any time.
Use this page for important notes ...
4. Financial and other Support: What am I entitled to?

WINZ
In 2013, Work and Income NZ (WINZ) made changes to the type of financial support available. People with a sensory disability such as sight loss may be eligible for financial assistance such as Disability Allowance, Child Disability Allowance, Supported Living Payment (replaces Sickness or Invalid Benefit), as well as Accommodation Supplement and the Community Services Card.

For funding and support available from WINZ, call toll-free on their General Inquiries number 0800 559 009 or visit their website: http://www.workandincome.govt.nz/individuals/ The website provides an easy way of checking what you may be eligible for, which is useful to do before you decide to complete any application forms.

When applying for financial assistance relating to a sight loss disability, it will be helpful if you are able to provide your most recent ophthalmic report or hospital clinic letter in conjunction with the medical certificate.

ACC
Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) is responsible for administering New Zealand’s accident compensation scheme and will fund treatment, rehabilitation and weekly compensation for people who have sustained injury and disability as a result of an accident. ACC Case Managers are the pivotal point for rehabilitation management in partnership with a person. Any need for support such as home help, equipment or rehabilitation would be assessed and then options considered regarding approval within the ACC legislative framework. www.acc.co.nz

Housing New Zealand
Housing New Zealand provides support to disabled people through the Suitable Homes service where Case Managers work with disabled people to assist them to find a modified home suitable to their requirements. In order to access this service an individual must live in New Zealand, have a long-term (longer than six months) physical disability and require housing that meets their disability needs. If any modifications need to be done to a home, the funding comes from other government agencies such as the Ministry of Health or ACC. Housing New Zealand can assist you to access this funding. The Suitable Homes service also supports disabled people wanting to modify their existing home regardless of whether it is their own or a rental.
Housing New Zealand maintains a database of Housing New Zealand properties that are modified. They will also network with landlords and other disability support organisations to ascertain availability of modified properties. www.hnzc.co.nz

Health and Disability Commissioner & Disability Advocacy Service
The Health and Disability Commissioner is an independent agency that supports and protects the rights of consumers who use health and disability services.

If you are a consumer of a health or disability service and are concerned that your rights have been disrespected, health and disability advocates will work alongside you in a support role to inform you of your rights when using health and disability services. You can contact them Toll Free on 0800 555 050. Alternatively you could email advocacy@hdc.org.nz or check out their website http://advocacy.hdc.org.nz

New Zealand Lottery Grants Board
The Individuals with Disabilities fund sub-committee allocates grants for mobility and communication equipment to assist people with disabilities to achieve independence and gain access to the community. Grants include the purchase and adaptation of communication devices. For funding purposes, an individual with a disability is defined as a person who has a permanently reduced capacity to be transported, personally mobile or to communicate, as a result of a physical, sensory, psychiatric or intellectual disability. To apply for funding or obtain further information contact toll free on 0800 824 824.
Email grantsonline@dia.govt.nz Web www.cdgo.govt.nz

Total Mobility Scheme
Total Mobility is a national scheme operated by local authorities. People who qualify for Blind Foundation services can access a system entitling you to a significant reduction on the normal taxi fare (usually about half fare). To find out more

The Pearson Fund
Is specifically for people who are registered with the Blind Foundation who have blindness-related costs. (refer to Page 4 to determine if you are eligible to receive services from the Blind Foundation).
5. Moving On - from Diagnosis to Acceptance

You are told "There is no cure ... you can no longer drive ..." and it seems like your whole world is turned upside-down. It is normal to experience a range of emotions from shock, grief, confusion, helplessness, anger, denial, sadness to depression and isolation, believing no one understands what is involved.

While it is very important to ask the Eye Professional about all the implications of your condition, be mindful that a gap in courage or communication, while normal, can contribute to a delay in accepting your sight loss. Having a support person with you at this time can be most helpful in understanding the information more clearly and being able to ask relevant questions.

Successful adjustment to sight loss begins when people adopt some of the common coping strategies:

• Take time to assess how you are affected by this information and what it means for you.
• Ask sensible questions of yourself and others. Be open and honest with those around you.
• Devise personal coping systems. You may not necessarily like the change but you can begin to accept that it has happened and be willing to work it into your life.

The most helpful way people can assist those dealing with sight loss, is to be genuinely attentive, patient, empathetic and non-patronising. Open communication and a positive attitude will help everyone involved to manage the transition to incorporate change.

In recognition of the unique circumstances encountered by people coming to terms with their sight impairment, there is support available. For people who are unable to register with the Blind Foundation, Retina NZ has support groups to help individuals and their families learn to cope with sight loss. Support groups provide a safe, confidential environment in which to share your concerns of what the future might hold. You will hear how others having similar experiences to you, find ways and develop strategies to help maintain their independence, achieve their goals and lead a fulfilling life. To find out more call our Peer Support Line - 0800 233 833.
If one-to-one support is preferred, the Blind Foundation does offer an initial counselling session to people who aren't registered. The professional counsellors are experienced in working with issues around sight loss. Doubts and anxieties can be explored freely without fear of judgement or embarrassment. One of the counsellor's roles is to reassure you that you do have the skills and the resources necessary to adjust to this sight loss. For ongoing support, the counsellor will suggest counselling agencies which would best suit your needs and also let you know of any financial support available for this. You can access this service by contacting the Blind Foundation on 0800 24 33 33.

For a 24hr counselling service, contact Lifeline New Zealand: Auckland (09) 5222 999 or 0800 111 777. A nationwide service is reached by calling 0800 54 33 54.

Accessing these supports means that many solutions can be just one phone call away.

Retina Youth Website
Retina NZ now has a youth forum for 18 to 35 year olds. Retina Youth has its own quarterly (email) newsletter, a Facebook group and a bright new website, creating awareness and discussion on issues that specifically confront young people with a degenerative eye disorder. There's lots of fun stuff too, so check it out, it's worth it. www.retinayouth.org.nz
It takes time to work out what will most help you at home. You might not achieve maximum efficiency overnight but believe it, you will get there. Let friends and family know that you are in transition, and that you won’t always be asking for help to find things.

It also takes effort to keep in touch with new developments in technical aids. Don’t be deterred if you are older or think new technology is beyond your grasp. Many of those who lose sight in their 80s and 90s master computers, smartphones and other technologies. That means they can keep in touch with friends and family by email, listen to audio books and work out ways of locating everything in the house.

“The trouble with you,” one totally blind woman told her partially blind friend, “is that you keep trying to use your eyes.”

There is a lot of truth in that. The habit of using our sight is deeply ingrained. If you have relied on it all your life, it is hard to stop being so sight dependent, even when using other senses would be more efficient.

We tend to keep creating larger and larger print and labels on household items or telephone lists, when there are other ways to handle this problem of identifying names and objects. Younger members of your family who grew up in a more technological era, will be able to help you find out about new devices for the blind and vision impaired.

Take for example, the electronic labelling device called a PenFriend. This small instrument comes with sheets of self adhesive stickers onto which you can record your own voice. It is genuinely simple to use and can be used to label medicines, CDs, household cleaners, pantry items and so on. To identify the labelled object you point the PenFriend at the small label and it replays whatever you have recorded. This item is available from the Blind Foundation, at a subsidised price for members and normal price for non-members.

A web-search for Pen-friend Audio Labeller or Talking Label Wand offers a range of similar devices and price options, or look for a smartphone app that may do a similar thing.
**Lighting**

Depending on your eye condition, controlling light intensity and minimising glare can be helpful. You might also find it useful to maximise contrast. Many of those who are legally blind can still see a piece of lint on a dark carpet, and this can be a cue about how to make objects more visible around the house. Lighting can be described as either general or task-oriented. General is the type that lights up the whole room.

There are also different kinds of light, and each person tends to have a preference for one of them. The main kinds are incandescent, halogen, and fluorescent. Compact Fluorescent Lights (energy-saving lights), are useful replacements for incandescent lights and are available in three colours; warm-2600k, cool-4000k, or daylight-5200k. Chromalux is another type of light that mimics natural sunlight. It is well worth your time figuring out which type of lighting helps you most. Visit a specialist lighting store for the latest products and up-to-date advice.

Here are some tips for using lighting to maximise your vision:

- Provide light throughout the room with additional task lighting. Avoid creating shadows. Don't work in a pool of light surrounded by darkness.

- Move lamps close to your work. To minimise glare, use an adjustable lamp and position it to the side, rather than directly in front of you. Many people find it helpful to have lamps on both the right and left sides - that will eliminate shadows.

- When writing, to prevent shadows, place the lamps on the opposite side of the hand being used. Locate the bottom edge of the lampshade just below eye level.

- To reduce glare, cover bare light bulbs of all types with shades. Soften bright light from windows with coverings like blinds or sheer curtains. Also, position the chair and table so you don't have to look directly at the light coming from the window.

- To further reduce glare, cover or remove shiny surfaces such as floors and table tops. Shiny paper can increase glare, so try to use matte paper when reading or writing.
• In hallways and stairways, provide generous amounts of light and position it so that it shines on the walls, floors, steps, and railings.

• Keep all rooms evenly lit. It can be difficult for your eyes to adjust from bright light to low light, so if you keep all rooms well lit, it will be more comfortable to walk from room to room. Try not to walk from a brightly lit room immediately to a dark one.

**Contrast**
The more contrast, the easier it is to find and use objects around the house. Below are a few hints for using contrast and other tricks to make your home more blind user friendly.

In the Kitchen:

• When pouring a light-coloured drink, such as milk, use a dark glass, and vice-versa. Transparent glasses can be tricky. Picking up another person's glass is a hazard on social occasions, so putting a rubber band or twist tie around your own one can help you keep track of it.

• Use white dishes when eating dark coloured food, and vice-versa. Make use of table mats, table cloths and coasters to heighten contrast with plates and other objects.

• When measuring dark-coloured food, like coffee, use white measuring cups. Use black measuring cups to measure light coloured food, like flour and sugar. Or just forget about straining to see, and use your sense of touch.

• It can be helpful to install contrasting coloured handles on doors and drawers.

• Use contrasting coloured stickers or dots to mark oven dials, microwave switches, dishwashers, and other appliances.

• Finding items in the back of cupboards, especially corner ones, can be a trial. If you're able to do a kitchen makeover consider corner drawers or installing those units that swivel out or revolve from the cupboard.
• Store pantry items in groups, putting similar items into shallow plastic containers of different shapes and colours. Group all cooking oils together, all canned fruit, all baking items etc.

• There are many useful kitchen gadgets such as the device you attach to the top of your cup and it beeps when the cup is nearly full. Other useful devices include talking scales, easy read or tactile timers, even talking microwave ovens!

In the Bathroom:
• For white countertops, use dark coloured toothbrushes, soap dishes, etc and vice-versa for dark counter tops.

• In a white bathroom, a dark bathmat draped over a white tub will make the tub easier to see. Similarly, contrasting coloured towels are also helpful.

• Use a light-coloured bottle for conditioner and a dark bottle for shampoo to make it easier to grab the correct product in the shower. If the shower walls and tub are white, use coloured soap.

• Avoid clear objects or objects that match the counter. They can disappear from view. Group similar items together so you don't use hair product to clean your teeth! A magnifying mirror can help with shaving or applying make-up.

General Areas of the House:
• Hooks and open shelves are a godsend. These make items more visible and they don't have to be scrabbled for in the recesses of cupboards.

• Put contrasting stripes on the edges of steps to make the steps visible and prevent the steps from disappearing from view. These can either be painted or you can purchase special tape for the purpose.

• On the telephone, most phones these days have a raised dot on the #5 to assist with dialling. It is easier to find the other numbers when you know where the #5 is.

• Paint gates and doors different colours than the rest of their respective fences and walls to make entrances easier to locate.
Around the home you could make things that much easier by:

- Removing area rugs.
- Moving furniture out of the main traffic areas.
- Keeping desk chairs and table chairs pushed in and keeping cupboard and room doors fully open or fully closed.
- Making it easy to locate electrical outlets and light switches and doorknobs by using colour contrasts.

To maintain harmony at home, try to get co-operation over these 2 basic rules: Firstly, everything in the house must be put away immediately after use, in its designated place, otherwise the blind person will never find it again. They will also be forced to ask sighted family members or flatmates to locate the missing item, which can be trying for all concerned. Secondly, nothing must be left on the floor, otherwise it will be stood on or tripped over.

**Low Vision Optical Aids**

Magnifiers vary. Some are used to see things that are near, like a newspaper, with others used for seeing distant objects, like street signs.

It is helpful to think of low vision optical aids as specific tools for specific uses. These are not intended as all-purpose aids. One device may be used for reading mail, another for watching movies, and yet another for seeing menus at a restaurant.

Unfortunately, low vision aids do not replace vision that has already deteriorated or been lost, but they will maximise your remaining vision and help you to enjoy your favourite activities and hobbies.

It is critical that someone with low vision gets the correct magnifier at the correct strength. There are hand magnifiers, stand magnifiers, pocket magnifiers, closed circuit television magnifiers, and they come in all sorts of shapes. There are magnifiers that look like mini-telescopes and some that look like glasses. Some can be worn around the neck and some come attached to a desk lamp. Some have built in lights. And of course, they come in many different strengths.

Once someone has the correct magnifier for a specific task, practice is essential. Learning to use a magnifier to read, attend plays, buy groceries, or engage in any other activity takes practice. It can sometimes be a bit of a struggle to adjust to using a magnifier, but it is worth the effort.
Being comfortable and skilled in using a magnifier can greatly improve its effectiveness.

When using a hand magnifier, it is important to hold it straight. The eye, the magnifier, and the material you are looking at should all be in one straight line. Tilting the magnifier will distort what you're trying to see. It is sometimes easier to keep the magnifier straight if you place the material being read on a clipboard or stand.

When using a stand magnifier, try to keep the magnifier on the paper rather than lifting it to your eyes.

Low Vision Non-Optical Aids
There are hundreds of devices that can help people with low vision manage their everyday living tasks. Readily available locally, including at the Blind Foundation and Low Vision Resource Centres, and through catalogues, these devices can often be just the thing to enable someone with low vision to maintain independence.

For example, bright-coloured bumpy marks can be put on an oven dial or washing machine so that you can recognise points. Someone with low vision can then easily find the 200 degree mark.

To help tell time, there are talking clocks and watches as well as clocks, timers, and watches with large easy-to-read faces. There are aids that thread needles, keep socks together, and help keep track of medication. For the exercise-conscious, even pedometers have learned to talk!

To help with writing, there are signature, letter, and envelope guides, bold black pens, and paper with thick black lines that are more easily seen. Playing cards, crossword puzzles, and even some board games come in low vision (larger print) versions.

Big-button phones make it easier to dial and large-print address books make it easier to read addresses and telephone numbers.

A cordless, rechargeable vacuum cleaner can be much easier to use than one which has to be plugged in at a different power point in each room. There are a range of brands now available, some with detachable dust busters and not requiring disposable bags.

The Blind Foundation has many non-optical aids available for visually impaired people to try at their equipment display days where displayed items can be purchased.
Without any significant financial or time commitment, you can make it easier to move around your community.

Some tips for travelling outside of your home are:

- Pre-plan your route by identifying landmarks that are easy for you to detect and use them as reference points.
- If a sighted guide will be required plan to organise this.
- If you require a mobility taxi, you can freecall 0800 50 55 55 from anywhere in NZ to order a local taxi. Handy if you're out & about, its also a freecall from your mobile phone.
- If travelling by bus and are unable to read the bus timetable, almost all bus companies will have a customer help line. If you let them know you're blind/vision impaired they'll advise you how to get from A to B.

When moving around your community you should consider:

- Lighting (carrying a torch)
- Planning your journey to avoid hours of darkness or adverse lighting conditions such as late afternoon sun.
- Choosing the most navigable route, by selecting orientation landmarks that are easily identified by size, contrast, smell or terrain.
- Controlling glare by wearing appropriate sunglasses or visors.
- Being organised, preparing scenario plans, enlarged route maps, phone numbers for assistance etc.

Some City Councils have developed special accessibility maps which will help people with disabilities find their way around the CBD more easily. Originally designed to promote wheelchair accessibility, these maps are useful for vision impaired folk too. To go where a wheelchair can go, means no stairs and not too many obstacles.

Whether you use an application on a smartphone or just telephone your local council, they will be able to advise you of temporary road closures or road works that may affect or alter the routes you normally travel. Give them a call and ask. Tell them you are vision impaired and need to know the safest route to your destination.
Orientation & Mobility Instructors

Orientation and mobility specialists provide training in:

- How to use your remaining senses to determine where you are.
- Techniques for safe movement from one place to another.

Instructional skills include:

- Sensory and motor development.
- Use of residual vision and low vision devices.
- Sighted guide techniques.
- White Cane techniques.
- Route planning.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Techniques for crossing streets.
- The use of public transport.

Orientation and mobility instructors are called upon to assist public transport authorities to minimise the dangers caused by complex road patterns (e.g., roundabouts, multiple street intersections).

To assist both you and your sighted guide to move together efficiently, a free brochure is available from the Blind Foundation (0800 24 33 33). You will be surprised how easy it is to be guided and how quickly your guides will become competent in assisting you in a dignified and effective way.
8. How will I read? How will I write?

Fortunately the question "Will I still be able to read, be able to write?" is no longer relevant to people with a sight loss. Rather the question is "How will I read, how will I write?". Assistive technology has advanced rapidly in recent years making it relatively affordable and easy to use. For more and more of us, our daily lives are not compromised by an inability to read and write. Here we describe each technology or piece of equipment and give you a brief insight into how assistive technology could re-claim much of your independence.

Reading Print
A sight loss does not mean losing your ability to independently read printed material such as letters and menus. There are several options depending on your residual vision and how and where you want to read print.

Following a professional assessment using a range of magnification options, you may find you cope well with just simple magnifiers. Video magnifiers are great if you have adequate residual vision. They magnify and enhance the contrast of text. Some models allow you to use a pen and thus write as well as read and there are portable units that can focus on distant objects such as signs and notice boards. Some mobile phones have software which will read printed material - you simply take a picture of the text and it is read aloud.

Accessible Books
Whether your level of vision means you qualify to receive Blind Foundation services or not, you have a number of options. Audio books are available from public libraries in New Zealand. These are usually in CD audio format. They are also readily available in MP3 downloadable format which can be read aloud on your computer. If you do not have a computer and wish to read CD books without being confined to a sound system, it is still possible to buy a small portable CD player or MP3 player that you can keep in a handbag or pocket.

International commercial organisations offer extensive catalogues of books, magazines and so on. Some of these lend the audio books free of charge to visually impaired people. Others are strictly commercial organisations which provide these for payment.
Downloadable audio books from audible.com
This is a commercial site offering over 150,000 downloadable audio books. The books are delivered in a choice of proprietary formats offering different trade-offs between audio qualities and download size. These books can be played on a computer or can be transferred to mainstream or special purpose MP3 players and mobile phones.

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iTunes also sells audiobooks that can play on any AAC or MP3 format device. You can also burn an MP3 audio file on to a CD and it will play in a Daisy (digital talking book) player with chapter markers. There is also the ebook format available for the iPad for those who can still see enough to read, the screen illumination offers that bit extra contrast that you just can’t get from a printed page. Alternatively, Voiceover - the built in accessibility software will read it to you.

Accessible books in text format are also available on the internet. Here you can download books which you can listen to using a screen reader on your computer or which you can transfer to a portable player which supports text-to-speech. The two key providers are Project Gutenberg www.gutenberg.org (most of the classics but few modern books, free access) and Bookshare www.bookshare.com (annual subscription fees apply).

So you have your book, magazine or newspaper, how do you play it or display it? Some mainstream MP3 players (e.g. Apple iPod shuffle) will play some audio books and can be operated by people with a sight loss. The iPod Touch, iPad and iPhone come equipped with Voiceover, a screen-reader which gives you full access to the device's facilities. With over 200 models available, most portable players will play protected WMA files allowing the user to download books from local public libraries which use the audio book service - Overdrive or similar.
Simplified navigation may be enjoyed when choosing a player designed for visually impaired people. They are more expensive than mainstream players but the features ensure a reading experience that is almost identical to that of a sighted person. The more popular brands include:

- Victor Reader Stream from Humanware
- Book Sense portable Daisy player from GWMicro
- Book Port Plus from the American Printing House for the Blind.

If you qualify for membership of the Blind Foundation (see page 4), a library of accessible books, newspapers and magazines, along with the device to play the book, are available free of charge.

**Computer Access**

Computers are especially useful to people with a visual impairment. Even if you are totally blind you can independently use a computer to:

- Keep in touch with friends and family around the world via email.
- Use the Internet to get information about almost anything.
- Use the Internet to do your supermarket shopping.
- Talk to your friends & family around the world for free via Skype.

**So how can you use a computer if you cannot see the screen very well or not at all?**

- If you have reasonable residual vision you can change the colours and fonts to achieve better contrast.
- If you have less residual vision you can use screen magnifier software to enlarge selected parts of the screen and to make the cursor and mouse pointers easy to locate and see.
- If you are blind you can use screen reader software to read aloud selected parts of the screen using synthesised speech.

Whatever your residual vision you do not have to use a mouse to operate your computer however, if you want to use the keyboard but can't see it, you can purchase high visibility labels to label the keys of your current keyboard or you can purchase an alternative easy to see keyboard. Although harder at first it is well worth learning to touch type. To that end you can buy a self voicing touch typing tuition programme.
Long term it is well worth learning to touch type and you will then never have to look at the keyboard. Initially touch typing is slower than using two fingers, but you will soon get faster. If you plan to use a screen reader or screen magnifier, remember that these are most easily controlled using the numeric keypad, so avoid keyboards which don't have a numeric keypad.

Assistive software such as NVDA [www.nvaccess.org](http://www.nvaccess.org) can be installed for free on a PC, and this free software is increasingly capable. Every Apple computer has accessibility built into its operating system, so comprehensive screen reader and screen magnifier function is available straight away. Similar functionality is built into most recent versions of Windows OS (Vista, Windows7, Windows8). Accessibility options have become increasingly sophisticated with both Windows7 and Windows8 being quite useful for basic accessibility assistance.

A screen magnifier can be very helpful if you still have useful residual vision. Some of the ways a screen magnifier can help include:

- Enhancing screen contrast by changing the colours.
- Enlarging the screen image.
- Choosing of magnification modes (the entire screen magnified or the screen split).
- Making the mouse pointer and the data entry cursor easier to find.

Every Windows version since Windows 98 includes a basic screen magnifier called Magnifier (look in Accessories/Accessibility). This optionally inverts the displayed colours to bright text on a dark background and magnifies the area round the cursor or mouse pointer in a window at the top of the screen. Accessibility options have become increasingly sophisticated with both Windows7 and Windows8 being quite useful for basic accessibility assistance. Commercial screen magnifier programs include ZoomText, Magic and Lunar - all of which offer free trial periods and incorporate screen readers.

If you only use your computer for email, internet access, creating and printing simple documents, and working with simple spreadsheets then you can use one of the free Windows screen readers. These are becoming more powerful and work with an increasing number of applications, so are a good starting point. Most screen readers can be stored on a portable memory card and used on any computer.
The leading full function screen readers are reasonably expensive but can be funded by Workbridge (see section 9 on employment and education). All fully functional screen readers offer time limited free trial versions and can be tailored to be highly usable and productive for specific applications, which might be vital for your employment. Fully functional screen readers include Window Eyes, JAWS and Hal.

**Mobile Phones**
A mobile phone is especially useful as you get out and about and you will be reassured to know you'll find one that works for you. From a basic model allowing you to access the screen, right through to models that support the global positioning system (GPS) and one which will read printed documents to you after you take a photograph of the document.

After installing the relevant software to a compatible mobile phone, you can access nearly all functions of your phone. Many smartphones have accessibility features built-in, so ask the retailer at the time of purchase if they can turn on accessibility features for you.

**Other useful gadgets**
Other liberating gadgets used by people with a sight loss include accessible watches (either easy-to-see, tactile or audible) and talking colour indicators (from checking clothes to checking fruit!) as well those optical & non-optical low vision aids, described in chapter 6.

Having read about all these wonderful machines and services here, you might want some independent advice on whether a device or software option is suitable. You can find independent appraisals, advice and reviews of equipment on the internet at [Access World Technology](http://www.accessworld.co.nz), [Cool Blind Tech](http://www.coolblindtech.co.nz) and [ATMac.org](http://www.atmac.org).
**Take the Amsler Test**

With an Amsler Grid you can detect early signs of distortion in vision. Distortion is a warning that you may be developing Macula Degeneration. Straight lines may look distorted and the centre of vision may look more distorted than the rest of the scene when you have a macula problem.

Carry out this simple test each week;  
Wear reading glasses if you use them. Cover one eye at a time.  
At a comfortable reading distance, look directly at the dot in the centre of the grid. Are all the lines straight? Are all of the squares the same size? If the grid is distorted, blurred or discoloured, you may have a macula eye problem.  

**Contact an eye professional immediately.**

**Age Related Macula Degeneration** - (ARMD or AMD) is a common eye condition in people aged over 50. The back of the eye contains a light sensing layer called the Retina. The Macula is a small area in the centre of the Retina that is specialised for tasks involving fine detail such as reading. With ARMD the function of the Macula deteriorates. A person may develop significant visual impairment, but rarely becomes totally blind.

- **The Warning Signs.** Distorted Vision - a kink in a doorframe, a wavy line of print or obvious blind spot.  
- **Early Diagnosis Important.** One form of ARMD is responsible for the majority of serious vision loss. If this form is detected early, treatment may be able to limit additional damage.  
- **What can I do?** Have eye examinations every 2nd year after the age of 50 and self monitor with an Amsler Grid. Smoking is a strong risk factor. There is also increased risk if there is a family history of ARMD.
9. Employment and education

Support for work
Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Development have funding available for equipment to support people at work. Each of these funding sources has different eligibility criteria. With the right equipment or support it may be possible to overcome the difficulties you are experiencing at work, or you might decide to retrain or move into another area of work.

Workbridge is a free employment service for people with any type of disability. To be eligible, you will have been living with the effects of your disability for a minimum of six months, be aged 16 - 65, and be a NZ citizen or have a valid work permit.

Workbridge administers government funding to help with work-related costs that are additional as a direct consequence of disability. Funding is available whether you are seeking to enter or retain employment, to commence or complete a tertiary education programme or enter into self-employment. Workbridge’s "Job support" funding can be accessed for workplace modifications, specialised training, assistive equipment and transportation costs. Contact them on 0508 858 858 or visit www.workbridge.co.nz

If you qualify for Blind Foundation services, you could access the assistance of the Employment Service for all areas relating to gaining or retaining employment including funding applications and equipment assessments. Call the Blind Foundation on 0800 24 33 33 to speak with an employment consultant or email employment@blindfoundation.org.nz

Mainstream is an employment incentive programme funded by MSD through Work and Income NZ. At the time of writing the Ministry of Social Development website advises the processes of the Mainstream program are being reviewed, so contact WINZ on 0800 559 009 for the latest information. WINZ can also provide information about other Work and Income products and services such as the Skills Investment Subsidy or Job Modification Grant. www.workandincome.govt.nz

If you are actively seeking employment, are a Work and Income client aged between 16 - 65 years and your sight loss will last longer than 6 months, Work and Income NZ may provide assistance. Employment Coordinators work with people on a Supported Living Payment who are looking for work.
Support for tertiary education

Universities have Disability Coordinators who help students identify what resources they will need to complete their studies and arrange the necessary support. This might include having a person or equipment to record information for you in class, or organising assistive technology such as screen readers. Disability Coordinators can advise you about getting funding for equipment through Workbridge, accessible.co.nz (if you live in Auckland or Northland) or enable.co.nz (if you live in the rest of NZ).

They can also liaise with teaching staff to make sure your needs are known, help make alternative arrangements for exams if needed, and ensure that you can find your way around the University and classrooms. Contact the Disability Coordinator or Disability Resource Office at your University for more information. You might also like to check with the University or the Blind Foundation regarding scholarships available for disabled students to help with fees and resources.

There may be assistance to help with the cost of fees and/or course materials for approved courses up to Level 4 on the NZQA framework through Work and Income if you are in receipt of Supported Living Payment. Ask your Case Manager about Training Incentive Allowance.

It is recommended to plan about six months in advance for your study as it takes time for equipment assessments and disability support needs to be arranged. If you are registered with the Blind Foundation, the Employment Consultant may be able to assist you to coordinate your study support.
Participation in recreational activities, whether they are energetic and challenging or quiet and relaxing, is integral to our wellbeing. You won’t be surprised to know this equally applies to people experiencing vision loss. But you may be somewhat enlightened to discover some of the ways in which participation in recreation and leisure activities is made possible for people with a sight loss.

It may well be that your chosen sport or recreational pursuit is being enjoyed by people with a sight loss in a similar way to, and alongside, their sighted peers. If you enjoy board games and cards there are enlarged print and tactile options, if you’re a music lover you’ll just become slightly more organised about managing your collection, if the garden is where you’re at peace with the world you’ll learn the simple logical ways to compensate for reduced sight. Similarly, your bowls game will improve with a little guidance, tramping through the wilderness will be safer on your guide rope or your volunteers elbow, cycling will be a little more intimate on your tandem and you’ll not give kayaking away either as obviously the tandem option is available here too. And then there are the sports with special adaptations - goalball, blind cricket and blind sailing - something for everyone you might say.

The enduring experiences of people with a sight loss participating in both specialised and mainstream recreational pursuits are characterised by positive outcomes - socially, physically and psychologically. Worldwide studies have revealed benefits such as a sense of belonging and peer support, improved self-esteem, increased fitness level leading to decreased stress and increased resistance to fatigue.

So you’re ready to get out there and enjoy those special times? Advice and support is available to help you get the most out of your recreation and leisure activities. A good initial point of contact is your local Regional Sport Authority Sport Opportunity Service or if you qualify, the Blind Foundation Recreation Service.
11. Making contact

To make an appointment, most Low Vision Clinics require a referral from either your GP, an eye health professional or from the Blind Foundation. We are aware of Low Vision Clinics at the following locations;

**Whangarei**

Eye Specialists Limited  
19 Kamo Road,  
Regent, Whangarei  
Ph: 0800 437 1160

**Christchurch**

Burwood Low Vision Clinic,  
Beacon House,  
Burwood Hospital - Entrance 2,  
Burwood Road, Christchurch.  
Ph: 03 383 6820

**Auckland**

Low Vision Clinic,  
Ophthalmology Department  
2nd Floor, Building 4  
Greenlane Clinical Centre  
214 Greenlane Road West.  
Ph: 09 307 4949 ext 27641

**Dunedin**

Low Vision Clinic,  
2nd Floor, Clinical Services Block,  
Dunedin Hospital,  
Cumberland Street, Dunedin.  
Ph: 03 474 7970

University of Auckland  
Grafton Campus Optometry Clinic  
Level 4, Building 502  
85 Park Road, Grafton.  
Ph: 09 373 7527

**UPDATE : Vision Solutions**

The Vision Solutions service is now available at all Blind Foundation offices throughout the country. Call 0800 24 33 33 for details.

**Tamaki Campus Optometry Clinic**  
Level 1, Building 730  
(Gate 1) 261 Morrin Road, Tamaki  
Ph: 09 303 5979

**Wanganui**

Wanganui Low Vision Trust  
Blind Foundation rooms  
102 Peat Street  
Ph: 06 348 4401

**Wellington**

Department of Ophthalmology  
Wellington Hospital  
Riddiford Street, Newtown.  
Ph 04 385 5999
Optometrists who offer Low Vision Appointments:

**Northland**
Sandra Field  
Northland Optometry  
36 Kamo Rd  
Kensington, Whangarei.  
Ph 09 437 0005

**Auckland**
Tony Cradwick  
Highbury Optometrists  
52 Mokoia Rd, Highbury  
Ph 09 418 1347

Heather Laird  
Visique Frith & Laird Optometrists  
Manurewa Medical Centre  
157 Great South Rd, Manurewa  
Ph 09 267 3160

Jan Birt  
MySight Optometrists Mt Eden  
460 Mt Eden Rd,  
Mount Eden  
Ph 09 630 3280

Wendy Hill  
Gates Eyewear  
17A Remuera Road,  
Newmarket  
Ph 09 524 4962

Naomi Meltzer  
Magnifiers + More  
437 Remuera Road  
Remuera  
Ph 09 520 5208  
(plus once a month at Pukekohe, Takapuna & Browns Bay)

**Waikato**
Rodney Stedall  
Paterson Burn Optometrists  
387 Anglesea Street, Hamilton  
Ph 07 839 3072  
Ph 07 821 1958 Cambridge  
Ph 07 871 7000 Te Awamutu  
Ph 07 885 0080 Tokoroa  
Ph 07 869 0420 Thames

Linda Tarbutt  
Tarbutt Optometrists  
33 Duke St, Cambridge  
Ph 07 827 6597  
Email: enquiries@tarbutt.co.nz

Nelson Retter  
Visique Matamata Visioncare  
48 Broadway, Matamata  
Ph 07 888 8726

Ross Gordon  
Taupo Visioncare  
66 Ruapehu Street, Taupo  
Ph 07 378 7529

**Bay of Plenty**
Lynley Smith  
Langford Callard Optometrists  
40 Elizabeth Street, Tauranga  
Ph 07 578 6413

Keith Miller  
Visique Greerton  
157 Chadwick Road,  
Greerton, Tauranga  
Ph 07 577 0113

Visique Rotorua  
1129 Pukatua Street, Rotorua  
Ph 07 348 5288
Hawkes Bay
Frederick Swain
Frederick Swain Optometrists
Cnr Hastings & Tennyson Streets,
Napier
Ph 06 835 7265

Scott Charlton
Specsavers Optometrists
205 Emerson Street,
Napier
Ph 06 835 3569

Diane Pearson
Visique Bennett & Pearson
7 Carlyle St, Napier
Ph 06 835 1234

Pearson & Hooker Optometrists
306 Gloucester Street, Taradale
Ph 06 844 4710

Amanda Shepherd
Visique Taradale Optometrists
299 Gloucester Street, Taradale
Ph 06 845 9500

Phil Donaldson
Visique Shattky on Russell
116 South Russell St, Hastings
Ph 06 876 3777

Niall McCormack
Specsavers Optometrists
247 Heretaunga Street West,
Hastings
Ph 06 878 8686

Manuwhatu
Brian Gifford
Visique Fielding
4 Manchester Square, Fielding
Ph 06 323 9067

Peter Giles
Eyes on Broadway
251 Broadway Ave,
Palmerston North
Ph 06 357 9782

Brian Naylor
Visique Naylor Palmer
Optometrists
211 Broadway Ave,
Palmerston North
Ph 06 358 8781

Bruce Little
Horowhenua Vision Centre
276 Oxford Street, Levin
Ph 06 368 6172

John Mellsop
Wanganui Visique Eyecare Centre
211 Wicksteed St, Wanganui
Ph 06 345 4665

David Goldsbury
Goldsbury Visique Optometrists
Suite 1, 210 Victoria Ave,
Wanganui
Ph 06 345 2874

Taranaki
Phillipa Charteris
Stratford Optometrists
65-67 Miranda Street,
Stratford
Ph 06 765 7764
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Optometrist</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Ph. Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kapiti Coast</td>
<td>Annette Morgan</td>
<td>Visique Kapiti Eyecare Ltd.</td>
<td>04 298 6373</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7A The Pier, Howell Road, Paraparaumu Beach</td>
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<td>Wellington</td>
<td>Andrew Black</td>
<td>Andrew Black Optometrists</td>
<td>04 387 9747</td>
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<td>7 Bay Rd, Kilbirnie</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peter Turner</td>
<td>Peter Turner Optometrists</td>
<td>04 472 8720</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>70 The Terrace, Wellington Central</td>
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<tr>
<td>SOUTH ISLAND</td>
<td>Catherine van Paassen Optometrist</td>
<td>16 Park St</td>
<td>03 755 7378</td>
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<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
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<td>Hokitika 7810</td>
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<td></td>
<td>John West</td>
<td>Coast Optometrists Ltd</td>
<td>03 768 6440</td>
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<td>8 Werita St</td>
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<td>Greymouth 7805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nelson/Marlborough</td>
<td>Julie Jones</td>
<td>Visique Harrington Eyecare</td>
<td>03 546 9160</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>55 Halifax Street, Nelson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Christchurch</td>
<td>John Veale</td>
<td>Veale &amp; Hulme</td>
<td>03 385 2071</td>
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<td>52 Shirley Rd, Shirley, Christchurch</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Leesa Stuart</td>
<td>Lincoln Eye</td>
<td>03 325 7267</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>32 Gerald St, Christchurch</td>
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<tr>
<td>NZ Association of Optometrists</td>
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<td>04 473 2322</td>
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**PATIENTS PLEASE NOTE** - While this list is updated prior to printing, it is not comprehensive. If there is no listing for your area, ask your local optometrist if they do Low Vision appointments or call us on 0800 233 833 and we can help you locate an optometrist near where you live.

**OPTOMETRISTS PLEASE NOTE** - If you do Low Vision appointments and would like to make readers of this book aware of that fact, please contact us on 0800 569849 ext2, or by email to secretary@retina.org.nz and we can include you in our next reprint of this book.
Glossary of terms

**Assistive technology** - a generic term that includes assistive, adaptive, and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities. Assistive technology promotes greater independence by enabling people to perform tasks that they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to or changed methods of interacting with the technology needed to accomplish such tasks.

**Audible** - capable of being heard.

**Goalball** - a team sport designed for blind athletes where participants compete in teams of three, and try to throw a ball that has bells embedded in it, into the opponents' goal. They must use the sound of the ball to judge the position and movement of the ball. Games consist of two 12 minute halves. Blindfolds allow partially sighted and sighted players to compete on an equal footing.

**Low Vision** - a subspecialty within the professions of optometry and ophthalmology dealing with individuals who have reduced vision even when using the best possible spectacle or contact lens correction available.

**Optical** - of or pertaining to vision or sight.

**Sensory disability** - An umbrella term for an impairment of one of the senses that affects important activities or functions of daily living.

**Sighted guide** - a person who guides a blind or partially sighted person - normally via the blind person grasping the elbow of the sighted guide.

**Tactile** - of, relating to or being the sense of touch. Perceptible by touch.

WMA, MP3 and AAC are music file formats.

References:

"Talking to your doctor", Lighthouse International, April 2010
"Technology and RP", RP Fighting Blindness, UK April 2010
"How do Blind People Use Computers?" Assn. of Blind Citizens of New Zealand, April 2010
"Peer Support Manual", Retina New Zealand 2005
"Living with Low vision The Low Vision Centre", April 2010
"Losing Your Sight, finding Your Way", Sight Loss Services
"Funding and disability" from www.supportoptions.co.nz
Membership Application Form

NAME: __________________________________________________________________________
(Mr Mrs Miss Ms Dr) (First Name) (Surname)

ADDRESS: _______________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________   POSTCODE: ________________

PHONE:   Home ( 0 ) ______________________    Work ( 0 ) _______________________
EMAIL: _____________________________________    Mobile: ___________________________

YEAR OF BIRTH:  __________________ ( For statistical purposes )

OCCUPATION   __________________________________________________________________

MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS
Waged ........................................................ $ 20.00
Unwaged ........................................................ $ 10.00   (50% discount applied)
Donation Retina NZ Research ....................... $ __________
Donation Retina NZ Members' Services ......... $ __________

TOTAL PAYMENT $ __________

All donations over $5.00 are tax deductible (a receipt will be issued).
There are three ways to pay your annual subscription. Please circle one.

1. By telephone banking or online bank transfer. The bank account number for payments to go into is: 12-3013-0845604-00. Please put your name and/or reference number in the reference box, so we can easily identify your payment.

2. Go into an ASB branch with this form and pay your deposit into the account number above. Remember to put your name and/or reference number in the reference box, so we can easily identify your payment.

3. Send us a cheque with your completed application form.

(When paid, this form becomes a Tax Invoice = GST No. 53-686-885)
Which format would you like to receive your Newsletter?  
(please selection one)  
• PRINT
• AUDIO-CD
• EMAIL
• EMAIL & PRINT
• EMAIL & AUDIO-CD

Are you a Member of the Blind Foundation?  YES / NO

SIGNED ____________________________    DATED ____________

Database Information Form
Retina NZ has a database detailing the different retinal conditions that our members have.  
We ask that New Members complete the Database Information Form. The information in this form will be securely stored and only released to Society office holders to enable them to do their work. Organisers of local meetings will only have access to contact details of people in their local area.

My eye condition is ____________________________________________

Please tick in the brackets in the left side of the page if any of this information applies to you.  
( ) I am a parent of a child/young adult with a retinal condition  
(state what) ____________________________________________

( ) I am the partner / sibling / friend of someone with a retinal condition  
(state what) ____________________________________________

( ) I am an Ophthalmologist

( ) I am an Optometrist

( ) I am a Scientist

( ) I am a healthcare professional or Blind Foundation staff.
Important Phone Numbers

Retina NZ - Admin ........................................................ 0800 569 849
Retina NZ - Peer Support .............................................. 0800 233 833
Blind Foundation ............................................................... 0800 24 3333
Your Eye Specialist ..........................................................
Other ..................................................................................

Other publications from Retina New Zealand Inc.

- Coping with some sight loss or a degenerative retinal condition. (DL Brochure)
- Supporting people with degenerative retinal disorders. (DL Brochure)
- Detached Retina - A matter of urgency. (DL Brochure)
- Take the Amsler Test - A self test for early detection of Macular Degeneration (A5 Card)

We also publish a quarterly newsletter which is available at no cost to members. It is available in print, audio, or via email as a pdf or text file. It serves to keep us informed of research updates, clinical trials and potential treatments, as well as practical advice to help us better understand our eye problems and the challenges that go with it, as well as interesting stories of member's personal experiences.

Membership is $20 per year for waged and $10 per year for unwaged or retired. To join simply fill out the application form and post it to us. If you're not sure about something or have any questions, simply give us a quick call on 0800 233 833
FREE INFORMATION LINE
0800 233 833