



INSIGHTS

Guide Dogs: Saving the Day for People With Visual Limitations

Being visually limited is challenging but vision impairment doesn't need to lead to helplessness. There are many programs, tools, and support systems available for people with vision limitations, including guide dogs. These canines are specially trained to provide comfort, safety and physical leadership to those with disabilities, including limited vision.

An estimated 10,000 guide dog teams—which includes guide dogs and their handlers—are currently working in the United States. However, it's also estimated that just 2% of people who use guide dogs do so because they're visually impaired.

Know the Criteria

To get a guide dog, you must meet several criteria. Some standard requirements have been outlined by most guide dog agencies, including the following:

- You must be legally blind
- You need to be aged 18 years or older
- You must be able to travel independently with a cane
- You must be able to walk for a minimum of 30 minutes without stopping
- You must be financially capable of caring for your dog
- You must complete orientation and mobility training or have owned a guide dog in the past

Skillset Training

Guide dogs go through months or years of training before they're equipped with the skillset and maturity to assist a visually impaired person. To perform their duties correctly, guide dogs must have social, physical, and professional skills. These include (among others):

- Basic and in-depth obedience training
- Intelligent disobedience, which means the dog will disobey a command if it's dangerous
- Ability to lead their owner safely around dangerous obstacles
- Ability to lead their owner out of harm's way
- Willpower to ignore distractions
- Restaurant and public etiquette

Where to Get a Guide Dog

There are many guide dog programs throughout the United States, and many of these groups provide services to people in all 50 states. In addition, the National Association of Guide Dog Users is associated with the National Federation of the Blind. It serves communities across the U.S. that seek more information about guide dogs.

Guide Dogs for Kids?

Most guide dog organizations are catered to adults, but some offer youth programs for children with visual impairments. These include:

- **Mira Foundation USA:** This group offers guide dogs exclusively for children aged 11 to 16 with visual impairments, physical disabilities, or Autism spectrum disorder
- **Guide Dogs for the Blind:** This program allows children with visual impairments to bond with a dog specially selected by the organization
- **Leader Dogs for the Blind:** While this group does not offer guide dogs to people younger than 18 years of age, it does offer summer camps and other events where young people can "test drive" what it's like to have a guide dog



EYENATOMY

Blurry Vision During Pregnancy: Is It Serious?

Blurred vision is an uncomfortable but common part of pregnancy. Blurry vision caused by pregnancy hormones won't always dissipate after childbirth. While most women return to normal vision during the first few weeks after delivery, it may take as long as 9 months for blurriness to go away in other cases. Women who already have a health condition—such as diabetes, thyroid eye disease, multiple sclerosis, high blood pressure, and uveitis—may experience worse symptoms during pregnancy. Your doctor can help you decide if what you're experiencing is normal.

Treatments & Remedies

If a medical condition causes or worsens blurred vision, follow these steps to help your eyes feel better:

Remove your contacts: The shape of your eyes may change during pregnancy. Wear glasses if contacts are blurring your vision

Take screen breaks: Help your eyes recover by taking breaks and looking away from screens every 20 minutes

Turn on extra light: The eyes can strain when reading or focusing in poorly lit rooms. Add some extra light

Use artificial tears: Artificial tears can help the eyes feel more comfortable but check with your doctor before starting any new treatment

It can sometimes take several months for hormone-related blurred vision to improve. If the eyes still feel blurry at 9 months after delivering a baby, new glasses or contact lenses may be necessary. A new vision prescription may be needed after a comprehensive eye exam.

EXPECT ALL-DAY COMFORT



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EYE-DROPS

Guide dogs are trained to navigate obstacles, including those that are too high for the dog but dangerous to their owner, such as low-hanging branches. To keep their owners safe, the dogs learn to be aware of a space up to two times their width and three times their height!



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Stop the Saltwater Burn Before It Starts



Saltwater can burn your eyes when the amount of salt in the water is much higher than what is found in tears or saline solutions. A high concentration of salt can dehydrate your eyes, which in turn can lead to eye burning, stinging, and redness. Ocean water and saltwater pools can both burn your eyes, but saltwater pool water will likely sting less than ocean water because it's not as salty.

Helpful Remedies

Patients are encouraged to use commercial eye rinses or contact lens solutions that contain saline. Some commercial products available that contain saline include:

- Eye wash
- Saline solution
- Isotonic saline (seawater) wash

Stop the Burn

You can prevent saltwater from burning your eyes by wearing swim goggles or a dive mask while swimming in saltwater. Keep a prepared eyewash on hand for exposure to saltwater or other irritants. You can prevent saltwater from burning your eyes by wearing goggles or a diving mask when you swim in the ocean or a saltwater pool. If you don't have goggles or a diving mask, don't open your eyes underwater. Lastly, see your optometrist for routine eye exams to catch eye problems early.



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