

# A guide to vision loss



# Aunty Mary's Story



Produced in consultation with Aunty Mary.



## Aunty Mary's Story

I'm Aunty Mary, and I'm a Bundjalung woman. I'm one of 12; eight in my family have diabetes. I am the only one who has vision loss from diabetes.

My eyesight changed from day to day, but when I lost my sight I was terrified of going outside. After listening to an ad on TV about Guide Dogs – that they offered cane training - not just dogs, I contacted them.

An instructor from Guide Dogs NSW/ACT came to my home to show me how to use a long cane. They taught me how to get to the shops, cross the road safely and move around my community on my own. They were able to help my family too.

I wouldn't have gained my confidence without the free training and support provided to me by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT.

I have my cane in Aboriginal colours – it makes me feel proud.

Call Guide Dogs. Once you make that initial phone call, it will be the best call you'll ever make.



## Understanding Vision Loss

Vision loss happens for different reasons, and this affects how people see. Some people get blurred or patchy vision. Others have problems with their central or side vision. Glasses don't always help.

A person's vision can change daily depending on lighting, weather conditions and their general health.

Often you can't always tell if a person has trouble seeing. People with Guide Dogs and canes may have some limited but useful vision.

## Vision conditions

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are six times more likely to get vision problems.\*



**Diabetic Retinopathy** is caused by Diabetes. The veins at the back of the eye can become damaged. Good control of diabetes and regular eye checks are important.

**Cataracts** are generally related to ageing and sun but can often be safely treated.

**Glaucoma** is caused by increased pressure in the eye. Often there are no symptoms.

**Macular Degeneration** is related to ageing. Risk factors include smoking and poor diet.

Vision loss caused by stroke or brain injury.

Have your eyes checked regularly, as often there are no symptoms to indicate your vision may be changing. However, if you are losing some sight, help is at hand.

\*National Indigenous Eye Health Survey, 2009, published by the Indigenous Eye Health Unit, Melbourne School of Population Health, The University of Melbourne in collaboration with the Centre for Eye Research Australia and the Vision CRC.

## Practical tips to help people with vision loss



### Guiding

Guiding is an easy way to help a person move about safely. The person will usually take your arm and follow you.

### Here are some basic tips:

- Ask the person if they need assistance.
- Make contact using the back of your hand or forearm so they know where your arm is located.
- They will usually hold your arm just above your elbow.
- Walk in front, at a comfortable pace and avoid hazards.



Modified Techniques - some people might have their preferred way of being guided. It's always best to do what they feel most comfortable with.



Mobility canes come in different sizes and colours.

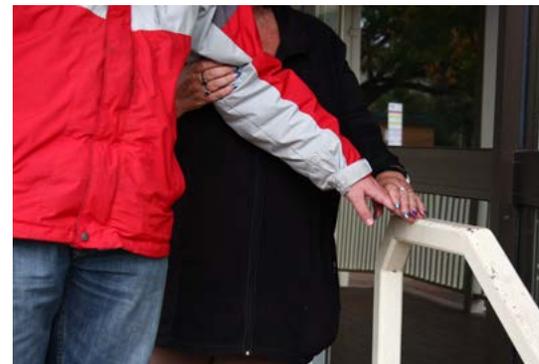


**Narrow space or doorway** – Slow down and move your guiding arm behind your back so you can walk in single file through the door .

When going through a door, tell the person which way the door opens.



**Chair** – Tell them what kind of chair it is and which way it is facing. Place your guiding hand on the back of the chair. The person will be able to find the chair and sit down.



**Stairs/gutters** – Tell the person which way the stairs are going – up or down.

Check if the person would like to use the handrail and if they need help to find where it is. Walk one step ahead. Tell them when they've reached the top or bottom of the stairs.



**Cars** – When you approach a car, tell the person which way the car is facing. Open the door and place your guiding hand on top of the door. When they are seated, let the person know when you are about to close the door.

## Practical tips to help people with vision loss

### Giving Directions

When offering help:

- Always introduce yourself
- Ask the person if they need assistance
- Ask how you can help



When giving directions, be clear and remember: **Left means their left, not yours.**

Directions like, “It’s just over there” isn’t enough for those who are blind.

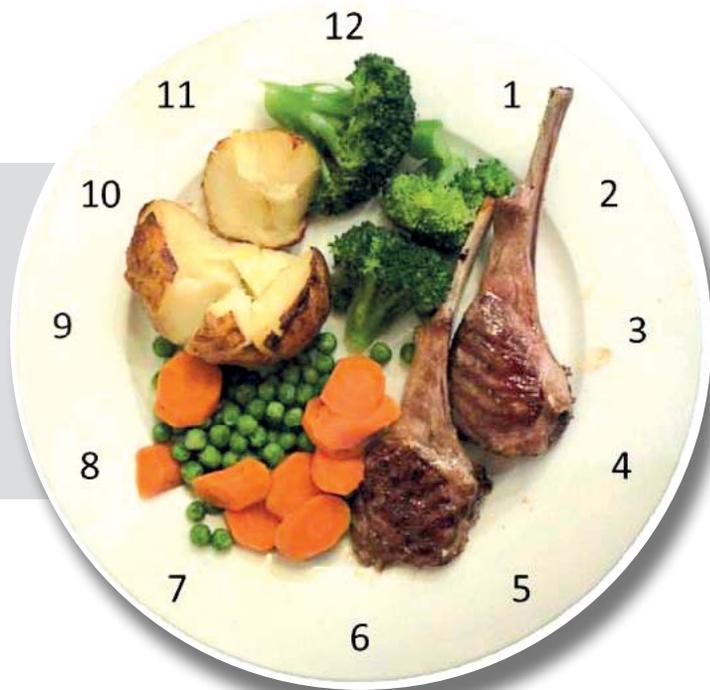
Try the “clock-face” technique.

Every day activities like going to a café can be made easier with some simple assistance. Some people may be able to read the menu whilst others may not.

If you’re not sure, just ask.

### CLOCK-FACE technique

This is a simple way to describe the location

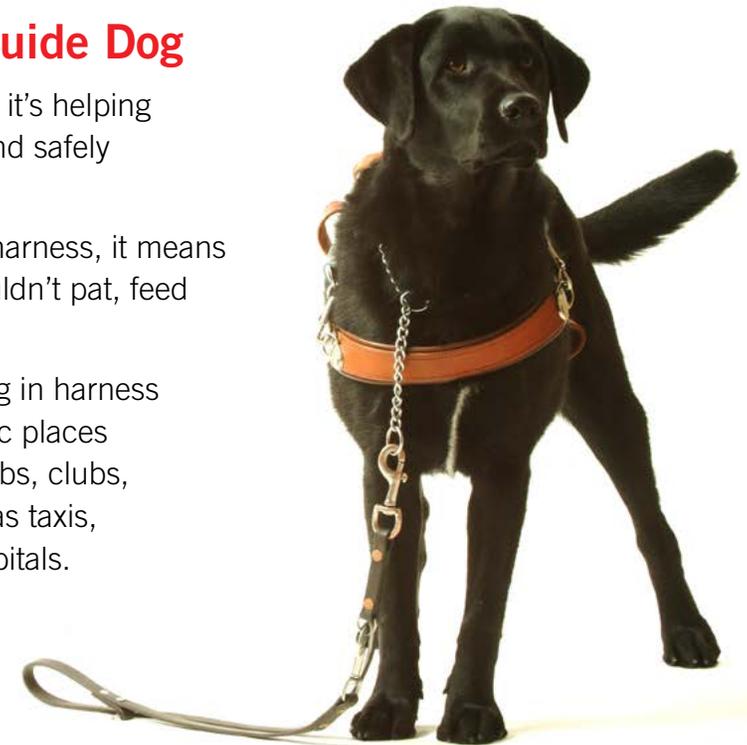


### Recognising a Guide Dog

A Guide Dog is not a pet; it’s helping the person to move around safely and independently.

When a Guide Dog is in harness, it means it’s working and you shouldn’t pat, feed or distract it in any way.

People using a Guide Dog in harness can legally enter all public places including restaurants, pubs, clubs, cafes and shops as well as taxis, public transport and hospitals.





Guide Dogs NSW/ACT provides help to people with different levels of vision loss from all walks of life and age groups. We offer a range of services and we'll come to you. All our orientation and mobility services including Guide Dogs are completely free to anyone who needs them.

*“Without Guide Dogs I wouldn’t know what to do. They are my backbone. Ring Guide Dogs, they’ll help you too.”*

Rodney Hooker, Aunty Mary’s husband

If you need help call Guide Dogs on **1800 804 805** or contact your nearest office

Albury	6041 5201	Newcastle	4925 3066
Ballina	6681 1667	Orange	6362 6625
Blacktown	9676 5802	Tamworth	6761 3152
Chatswood	9412 9300	Wagga Wagga	6925 3559
Coffs Harbour	6652 7424	Wollongong	4225 9247
Deakin (ACT)	6285 2988		

[www.guidedogs.com.au](http://www.guidedogs.com.au)



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