



Staying Balanced with Vision Loss: The Importance of Preventing Falls



A physical therapist works on balance with a woman.

According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Wisconsin has the highest rate of fall-related deaths—more than twice the national average. Falling also may cause other injuries. Nationally, falls are the leading cause of non-fatal injuries for those 65 and older. In 2014, falls were attributed to 800,000 hospitalizations and 2.8 million emergency department visits nationwide, according to the CDC.

You can take steps to reduce your risk of falling with a little planning and simple

redecorating. In this article, we will share how vision loss impacts falls, tips for falls prevention, and resources that can help you and your family members reduce the chance of falling in your home or out and about.

Increased risk of falling can result from vision loss. This is because vision plays a role in maintaining balance. Staying upright is achieved by integrating information from three body systems. Eyes perceive information about where objects are through vision. Muscles and joints tell where the body is in space. The inner ear senses motion, equilibrium and balance. If one or more of these systems is not working properly, it can be difficult to maintain good balance.

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Here are some tips to reduce the risk of falls:

- **Make an appointment with your doctor to discuss all medications you take.** Your physician or pharmacist can let you know if the side effects include dizziness or trouble balancing. They can also talk to you about any health issues you may have that might make falls more likely, such as orthostatic hypertension, which affects blood pressure when one goes from sitting or lying down to standing.
- **Add more light in your home.** Where needed, place lamps in darker rooms, put night lights in bedrooms or bathrooms, and consider putting glow-in-the-dark light switches on switch plates. Keep flashlights in a convenient place throughout your home in case of a power outage.
- **Do minor redecorating in your home.** Remove throw rugs, pick up piles of books and papers, tuck electrical cords away from walking paths and move coffee and end tables out from the center of the room. By keeping your space clean, you can walk hazard-free.
- **Use devices to assist you.** Raised toilet seats, grab bars in showers or tubs, and bath mats on tile floors can decrease the risk of slipping and falling.
- **Wear slip-resistant shoes, or socks with grip pads on them.** While walking around in your socks may be comfy, wearing sturdy shoes with good grips will reduce falls. Be sure your shoes fit well. A shoe that fits provides room for toes to wiggle and for you to walk comfortably without tripping.
- **Find an exercise class you enjoy.** Staying active strengthens muscles and improves balance. If your doctor says it is okay for you, try walking, aqua aerobics or tai chi. These gentle exercises improve flexibility, coordination, strength and balance. A physical therapist can work with you to customize an exercise routine for your specific needs.

Programs such as Stepping On, can teach additional strategies to prevent falls.

Programs such as Stepping On, can teach additional strategies to prevent falls. There is a cost to attend. Contact the Wisconsin Institute for Healthy Aging, **(608) 243-5690** or **info@wihealthyaging.org**. The Council can work with you to reduce the risk of falling. To discuss the benefits of a low vision evaluation or an in-home vision rehabilitation visit, contact Amy at **(608) 237-8107** or **AWurf@WCBlind.org**. ■

Congratulations to the 2019 Council Excellence Awards and Scholarship Recipients

The Council is delighted to recognize the 2019 Excellence Awards winners, and to announce the recipients of the scholarship program. Scholarships and Excellence Awards were presented at a luncheon on Saturday, May 18, in Madison.

Excellence Awards Winners:

The Council has awarded three individuals and one organization for outstanding contributions in promoting the dignity and empowerment of those living with vision loss:

- **Nona Graves** — Louis Seidita Lifetime Achievement Award
- **Jim Turk** — Community Volunteer Award
- **Judy Lehmann**, Watertown School District — Community Volunteer Award
- **Greenville Lioness Club** — Community Giving Award



The Council nominating committee with award winners.

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Scholarship Recipients:

The ten students were recognized for their academic endeavors, community and extra-curricular participation. Each student received \$2,000 for tuition at a post-secondary school of their choice. The 2019 scholarship recipients are:

- **Alexander Kloety**, UW-Milwaukee graduate school, career goal: mental health professional
- **Amy Hatten**, UW-Madison graduate school, career goal: rehabilitation counseling
- **Brandon Klas**, incoming freshman, UW-Whitewater, career interest: business
- **Christina Alger**, graduate school at the University of Minnesota, career goal: English teacher
- **Elena Santin**, freshman, Lawrence University, career interest: piano performance
- **Hunter Lemerond**, junior, UW-La Crosse, career interest: business
- **John Harrison**, junior, UW-Whitewater, career interest: writing and advocacy
- **Mia Zutter**, junior, the College of Saint Scholastica, career interest: public speaking and writing

Council Events

March:

Dining in the Dark:

Charlie's on Main: 20 attendees; Madison College: 30 students participated in hospitality and server training.



June:



Birding by Ear:

50 participants.

Sunglasses Webinar:

15 participants; call Kris at the Sharper Vision store for product information
(608) 237-8105.



July:

Disability Voter Registration

Week: 42 people used the ExpressVote accessible voting machine.



Disability Pride Festival in Madison

500 attendees

Gospel 5K:

125 attendees — 40 people stopped at the Council table.



- **Sean Whalen**, Harvard, law school, third year, career goal: attorney

- **Shannon Columb**, senior, UW-Stevens Point, career interest: environmental education ■



The 2019 Council scholarship recipients.

August:



Low Vision Fair:

Education, speakers, adaptive products; 75 people attended.

Disability Pride Festival in Sheboygan
125 attendees



June/August:



Social Media for All of Us:

at Social Media Breakfast Madison more than 100 attended the June event, more than 1,100 views of the online video. Forty people attended the presentation at Forward Festival in August.

A Note from Denise



Denise Jess

Advocacy has been a cornerstone of the Council's mission since our founding in 1952. Accomplishments include ensuring accessible instructional materials for post-secondary students attending a Wisconsin college, university or technical school, and service animal protections. We are a consistent voice in advocating for pedestrian safety and increased transit, high quality vision rehabilitation services and employment training geared to meet the needs of those experiencing vision loss.

Advocating to promote the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired is a major endeavor with ever-growing complexity. The community of people experiencing vision loss continues to grow and diversify. In days past, blindness was considered a "low-incidence" disability with many of us being blind/visually impaired since an early age. Today, our population is set to double as middle-aged and older adults acquire vision loss through genetic disorders and disease. This population brings diverse perspectives, life experiences and needs.

Attending to a diverse population requires more innovation and concentrated effort. The Council continues to build relationships with partners to strengthen our voice. This coalition work helps bring awareness of the needs of people who are blind and visually impaired and supports the Council to grow its advocacy footprint.

We continue to enlist members of the blind/visually impaired community to become advocates. Our monthly Legislative Update newsletter offers information on issues, outlines the Council's work and offers action steps for individuals that are personal, tangible and impactful. If you aren't already subscribed, please visit the Council's website to join the list.

As we move into the next decade, self-advocacy will be even more important. 2020 offers us two outstanding ways to have our voices heard; the 2020 Census and the 2020 Presidential Election.

The Census is rooted in our Constitution and serves as a headcount of every person living in the United States. Census data determines our

representation in the U.S. House of Representatives and guides funding for critical services. Beginning in March, we will have the opportunity to complete the Census. In the past, the only way to do this was through a paper form, which was a barrier for those of us with vision loss. Beginning this year, the Census can now be completed online, via telephone or the traditional paper form. The Council is working with local Census officials to determine if the online platform is accessible to assistive technology users. Information shared on the Census is confidential.

2020 is a major election year with races at the local, state and national levels. We have the right and responsibility to vote in every election. In the words of disability activist,

Justin Dart, "If you don't vote, you don't count." Thanks to the efforts of the Council and the Disability Vote Coalition, in partnership with the Wisconsin Elections Commission, voting is more accessible than ever before.

In advance of the first election, check your voter registration status at **myvote.gov**; this is especially important if you've moved since the last election. Also, check to be sure you have proper identification needed to vote.

There will be many candidates on the various ballots. Check with the Wisconsin League of Women Voters to learn more about the candidates. Follow the Council and the Wisconsin Disability Vote Coalition to keep apprised of issues relevant to people with disabilities.

For other self-advocacy ideas, including how to contact your legislators, visit the Council website.

If self-advocacy is new to you, welcome aboard. If you are a long-time self-advocate, thank you!

Sincerely,



Denise Jess
CEO/Executive Director

Advocating to promote the dignity and empowerment of people who are blind and visually impaired is a major endeavor.

Stop by the Council's Art Exhibit

Enjoy an accessible art display at the Council. At the annual Fall Gallery Night art show, Wisconsin artists who are blind or visually impaired have works on display and for sale. Artists participating in the exposition are: Richard Berholtz – ceramic masks; Duncan Hamilton – oil pastel paintings; Rosemarie Fortney – alcohol inks on Dibond; Alison Fortney – photography; Albert Schmiede – acrylics on canvas.

The exhibit is accessible to people who are blind or visually impaired. Artist statements and tags are available in large print, braille and audio via the PenFriend. When the device is brought close to the tag near each piece of artwork, a recording of the text will be read aloud.



A Walk in the Woods by Rose Fortney.



An artist and attendee check out a painting.

Art is on display until Friday, November 15. To set up a group or individual tour, call the Council at **(800) 783-5213.**

The office is located at 754 Williamson Street in Madison, and open Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Thank you to SVA for generously sponsoring this event. ■

Vision for Tomorrow Online Auction: Your Bid Helps the Council Create Welcoming Spaces

Dining gift cards, a basketball autographed by UW Badgers Head Coach Greg Gard, dance lessons, and gift baskets are just a few of the items you will have the opportunity to bid on and win during the Council's Vision for Tomorrow Online Auction.

You can read about
and view auction
items starting Friday,
October 25.

The online auction opens on Thursday, November 7 at noon and closes Wednesday, November 13 at 8:00 p.m. Create a free account or sign in with your email address and password at **biddingforgood.com/wcbvi** to place your bids. You can read about and view auction items starting Friday, October 25.

Auction proceeds will be used to purchase more welcoming furniture for the large conference room at the Council office. Creating welcoming spaces is part of the Council's mission to be inclusive of all who use our facility, including other nonprofit organizations and coalitions. The tables currently used are large and heavy, making it difficult to arrange the room for groups of varying sizes and with different needs.

Conference room guests are likely to have impaired vision. They require easy access to a power source to charge magnifiers, laptops, CCTV units, and additional lighting. Exposed power cords may be a tripping hazard, so having them tucked away is a necessity. Purchasing new furniture would provide the opportunity to incorporate these factors into our conference room amenities.

The Council regularly hosts conference call meetings for anywhere from 3 to 20 attendees. The ability to rearrange the seating layout and easily stow away unused tables would make the room more welcoming for small groups, and still offer the flexibility to host larger groups.

The Council welcomes fellow nonprofits to use the space free of charge and wishes to offer hospitality, flexibility and safety for guests.

Every auction bid helps to raise the needed funds. Thank you for supporting the Council in creating a welcoming space and inclusivity for all. ■

Monthly Giving: Join the White Cane Circle to Ensure the Council's Future

Consider adding a donation to the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired into your monthly routine. A gift of any size would make a significant impact for someone who is adjusting to life with impaired vision.

As a monthly donor, you become a member of the White Cane Circle. White Cane Circle members—and prospective members—are an important part of the Council's future. The power of monthly giving is the sustainability the gifts provide to cover costs over the course of the year.

Wayne and Beulah are monthly donors to the Council. Wayne says, "I worked as a rehabilitation teacher serving 11 counties out of the Wausau office. I ordered products from the Council for my clients. My wife and I have been annual donors. Since it became possible for us to give on a monthly basis we decided to do that, because then the Council knows what is coming in each month and does not have to do any guessing. As a person who is blind, I think the work of the Council is important and worth supporting."

You can choose the amount of the gift and whether you will make the donation through a bank account, credit card or PayPal. Here are a few examples of what your gift can do in one year:

\$6/month buys white canes for two people

\$10/month pays for two hours of assistive technology training

\$20/month pays for three low vision evaluations

Consider making a monthly gift to the Council. You can do so by using the enclosed envelope or giving online at **WCBlind.org**. Thank you.

Thank You to the Following Grantors:

The Council appreciates the following organizations for providing grant funding to make these services possible:

- **Industries for the Blind and Visually Impaired** — Funding for data gathering from scholarship recipients on their job seeking and interview experiences. The Council will use this information during meetings with legislators and in other advocacy initiatives.
- **An anonymous foundation** — Outreach to people with vision loss and organizations serving those with vision loss in southwest Wisconsin. This helped the Council reach more people and partner with other organizations when appropriate. Prior funding helped create the "*A Welcoming Main Street*" guide, distributed in communities in the area.
- **La Crosse Community Foundation** — Bring pedestrian awareness to the attention of drivers living and working in the La Crosse community through ads placed on the side of city buses.
- **The Evjue Foundation, Inc., the charitable arm of The Capital Times** — Funding to braille the Courier. We are able to provide Courier in formats accessible to more than 60 readers who use braille.

Thank you for supporting the Council's work in education, advocacy and vision services.

Upcoming Council Events

Mark your calendar and join the Council at these upcoming events.

Sharper Vision Store Webinar:

Date: Thursday, November 7

Time: 10:00-11:00 a.m.

Location: Online and by telephone via Zoom

Join Kris Johannsen, Sharper Vision Store Manager, as he demonstrates adaptive products that make great gifts for others—or for yourself.



Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired

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Vision for Tomorrow Online Auction:

**Dates: Thursday, November 7 at Noon till Wednesday,
November 13 at 8 p.m.**

Location: Online at **www.biddingforgood.com/wcbvi**

Place your bids on fun items such as gift cards to restaurants, signed sports memorabilia and much more. Auction proceeds go toward helping the Council create a more welcoming space in our facility.

Stay Connected

Stay up to date on events, legislation, news and technology related to blindness or vision loss by subscribing to one of the weekly Council emails. Council Courier is available in large print, braille and CD. To request an alternative format, email Mitch at **mbrey@WCBlind.org** or call **(608) 237-8119**.

