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## **Lesson 17: Recreation: A Must in Everyone's Life**

### **Introduction**

Pastimes, hobbies, and personal interests are enjoyed by people who are blind or have low vision and are as varied as the individuals themselves. Almost any recreational activity you can think of has been or can be adapted for visual impairment. For example, if you once enjoyed golf, skiing, bowling, or swimming, these sports are still accessible with very few modifications. People who are blind or have low vision enjoy crafts like pottery, knitting and crocheting, ceramics, and woodworking. If you enjoy reading, you may be struggling to cope with the loss of accessing print books; however, there are still great options for reading. For example, many individuals develop a love of reading through Talking Books.

Recreation is a must in everyone's life, and that includes you. Sports, hobbies, games, physical activities, and other activities offer endless benefits to your health and sense of well-being. Perhaps the most valuable benefit of recreational activities is the opportunity to interact socially with a diverse group of individuals.

The Internet is a great way to look for groups, organizations, or programs for people who are blind or have low vision. Go to the search box of a web browser and type the word "blind," followed by whatever activity you are interested in, like "blind knitting," "blind cycling," or "blind board games." If the Internet is not your thing, ask a friend or family member who uses the Internet to help research activities. At the end of this lesson, you will find contact information for a variety of recreational organizations.

### **Lesson Goals**

- Access books, magazines, newspapers, and other reading materials in a variety of audio formats
- Join family and friends in playing cards, checkers, dominoes, Scrabble, Jenga, and other games, with or without adaptations
- Participate in favorite hobbies, such as pottery, knitting, woodworking, gardening, genealogy, or coin collecting, with or without adaptations

- Take part in sports like golf, skiing, bowling, swimming, or baseball, competitively or as a spectator
- Enjoy outdoor recreation, such as hiking, camping, sailing, biking, fishing, or bird watching, alone or with others
- Improve your physical and mental wellness through exercise, dance, yoga, or volunteering, alone or with others

## **Accessible Reading Options**

Most people probably do not know that phonograph records were created specifically to provide recorded books for people who were blind and couldn't read print. Today, audiobooks can be heard through a new generation of listening devices and a popular reading option for visually impaired and sighted audiences. Almost any popular novel, nonfiction book, general interest publication, trade magazine, or newspaper is available in various accessible audio formats.

### **National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled**

The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), sometimes called the Talking Book Library, is a network of cooperating libraries similar to a local library, except they distribute books or magazines that are audio recorded, large print, or braille to people with visual or other disabilities who cannot access regular print books. Books called Talking Books are loaned through the NLS program and mailed free. Each audiobook is recorded on a cartridge and played on a reading machine, which is loaned free of charge by the NLS. Talking Books can also be downloaded from the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) website and played on the Talking Book digital player or another specialized audio player via a USB thumb drive. A free BARD app is available for iOS, Android, and Kindle devices that allow users to search for, download, and listen to audiobooks.

Most states have a Talking Book Library that distributes players and books. You may be assigned a reader consultant who can teach you how to order books and use BARD. The players come with instructions, and each button on the player, if pressed without a cartridge inserted in the device, will



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announce its function. Books come in a container approximately 4" x 4" by 1". On the front is a card with your address; on the back is the Talking Book library's address, or in some cases, it is printed on plastic underneath the card. To return the book, turn the card over, or remove the card, and the book will be ready to mail without adding postage.

To apply for this service, call 800-424-8567, or visit National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Eligibility, to ask for assistance from state or private agencies that provide services for those with blindness or low vision.

### **Audio Players Designed for People with Visual Impairments**

Some audio players are designed specifically for those with blindness or low vision and do not require visual prompts. Instead, these devices are operated with audio prompts and easy-to-use keys.

One of the most popular devices is the Victor Reader Stream (VR Stream). This device is sold by HumanWare and is about the size of a deck of cards. It features text-to-speech capabilities and digital audio support. With the VR Stream, you can read electronic files with synthetic speech or digitally recorded books with human speech. It plays books in various digital formats, including Learning Ally, Talking Books from the NLS, and Bookshare. It can also play downloaded music.

Electronic access to print material and books has changed the way readers of all abilities read. Devices like the iPad, smartphones, and Kindle Fire have increased access to printed material and the availability of new publications for people who are blind or have low vision. Electronic text lets low vision readers enlarge print by increasing the font size on a device. People who cannot read print can use screen reading software, like JAWS or NVDA, on a computer or Apple's VoiceOver to have text read aloud by a synthesized voice.

If reading your favorite newspaper is the way you like to begin your day, then try the NFB-Newsline. This free program, provided by the National Federation of the Blind, allows users to access many national, state, local, and international newspapers and magazines. These reading materials can

be accessed through the telephone, on the web, or through an app. To learn more and to sign up, visit the National Federation of the Blind-Newsline.

### **Optical Character Recognition**

Some methods and devices use optical character recognition to read printed materials. One commonly used standalone scanning software program is called Open Book. This software allows a person who is blind or has low vision to put a page of printed material on a scanner that looks like a small copy machine. Scanners using Open Book will scan the printed material and convert it to speech to listen to the printed page's information. This method can be used for single sheets of printed material or for a full book (one page at a time).

Similarly, apps are available that work by simply taking a picture of printed material and then reading the information audibly. These smartphone apps are useful for reading menus and directions on food packages and can even scan multi-page documents. Various stands can be purchased to hold the smartphone for longer scanning tasks.

Braille is also a great way to access print. Braille is a reading and writing system by touch used by people who are blind or have low vision. It uses a system of dots for the alphabet, numbers, punctuation, and words. It requires touch and memory, but people of all ages can learn to read braille. The Hadley Institute provides no-cost distance education on braille reading via large print, audio, and internet courses. To contact Hadley, call 800-323-4238.

### **Playing Games**

Playing games with friends or family is a popular pastime. Getting together with friends for an evening of canasta, dominoes, Wits & Wagers, or trivia can alleviate stress, release calming endorphins, and provide a social outlet. A game of Scrabble, chess, or dominoes between a grandfather and his granddaughter creates memories and strengthens bonds. Weekly card games hosted by a local Senior Center can provide a social outlet, an opportunity for healthy competition, and a place to develop new friendships.



If you have difficulty seeing cards, Scrabble letters, or a game board, you may shy away from these events. But there is good news! Following are some methods and tools that can allow you to continue playing the games you enjoy.

### **Adapting Games**

Many games have been adapted for people who are blind or have low vision. Catalog companies or stores specializing in products for seniors or people with visual impairments offer large print playing cards and bingo cards. There are Scrabble and checkerboards with raised edges around each square with interlocking pieces. Monopoly, Chinese checkers, and other games have versions adapted for people who are blind or have low vision.

Some of these games are expensive, so before you buy, consider adapting the games you own. Many games need a few adaptations to be accessible. For example, a Cribbage board can be adapted for low vision by outlining peg holes with a contrasting color. If you love dominoes, buy white Dominoes with raised black dots and play on a dark surface. Low vision players can see the dominoes' outline and tell where to add on; blind players can feel the raised dots and know where to play. Games like Mancala or Jenga do not need adaptations to play with a visual impairment.

If you enjoy playing cards—bridge with a bridge club, canasta at a senior center, or hearts with your grandchildren—but can't see large print cards, then consider learning enough braille to play using braille playing cards. Braille playing cards are standard playing cards with the numbers and suits printed on them, but they also have braille symbols printed in the upper left and lower right corners of each card. Learning 15 braille symbols is all that's needed to play any card game. It may take a little time, but it's worth it to continue having fun!

Some individuals with low vision might prefer to use other options. Instead, they might use a magnifier or a task lamp to help them see the cards. When the cards are laid on a table, others can be asked to call out the cards as they play.



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## **Solo Games**

If you enjoy competing against yourself, some bookstores and specialty stores sell large print Sudoku and crossword puzzle books. There are also special jigsaw puzzles with larger pieces that are easier to see and lock in place, especially if you have arthritis or mild tremors.

## **Online Games**

If you have internet access, you can enjoy free games. Many popular games can be found online including sudoku, solitaire, Uno!, chess, and Boggle.

After considering these adaptations and options, you can host a game night for friends or family. Adapt some of your games or buy large print cards. If you aren't ready to try adapted games, play a game like Wits & Wagers or Outburst that requires only one sighted person or someone with low vision using a magnifier to read the game questions. Remember, the real purpose of playing games is to have fun with friends and family!

## **Going to the Movies**

Many people enjoy going to see a movie at a movie theater, and people who are blind or have low vision are no different. Have you stopped going to movies because it is difficult to follow what is happening on the screen because you cannot see it? Do you get tired of being shushed by others because you have to keep asking the person next to you what is going on in the movie?

Many movie theaters offer a free service to customers who are blind or have low vision called descriptive video. To use this service, the movie theater will give you a headset. When wearing the headset, you will hear a narrator describe what is happening on the screen when no words are being spoken or when the action is too fast to follow visually. Only you will hear the described video through the headset. It is good to call the movie theater ahead of time to reserve a described video headset, as some have only a limited number. If your favorite movie theater does not offer this service, let them know it is a wonderful service they could be offering to customers who are blind or have low vision. Note that many DVD movies



have built-in audio description. Select the audio described soundtrack before beginning to play the movie.

In addition to movies, many television shows are now produced with described video. Contact your local television station or provider to find out which programs offer described video service and how to access this service on your television. Many televisions can access the audio descriptions when the secondary audio program (SAP) is turned on. By the way, specialty catalogs and stores sell remote controls that are easier to see. Also, some newer remote controls have microphones and can be operated with voice directions.

## **Hobbies**

For many, hobbies like pottery, knitting, gardening, genealogy, collecting coins or baseball cards, or woodworking are ways of expressing their inner selves and gaining a sense of achievement. Nearly every kind of hobby is enjoyed by people who are blind or have low vision. There is not enough space in this lesson to describe adaptive techniques for more than a few activities, but you can find resources for almost anything you want to pursue.

### **Knitting and Crocheting**

If you enjoy knitting or crocheting but have hesitated to continue, here are a few suggestions:

- Switch to larger needles or thicker yarn. Large needles make it easier to count stitches and check your pattern.
- Use light-colored yarn and place a dark towel underneath to add contrast.
- Use simple patterns that won't require reading detailed instructions or create your instructions in a font you can read, enlarge them on a copier, record them, or use magnification. Some specialty companies sell large print knitting and crocheting pattern books.
- Work with your fingers close to the tips of the needles. It will be easier to tell if you've dropped a stitch or left one unadded.
- Keep count of rows or stitches by dropping a penny, small button, or

bead into a container as each row is completed. You could also buy an abacus to help with counting.

- Keep your yarn in a container, like a can with a plastic lid. Make a 1-inch hole in the center of the lid and thread one end of the yarn through it to prevent the yarn from rolling away or getting tangled.
- Put rubber bands on the tips of your needles to keep stitches from falling off when you're not working on a project.

Revisit Lesson 9 for ideas for labeling and organizing your yarn and needles.

### **Genealogy**

If vision loss caused you to stop exploring your genealogy, you would enjoy Lesson 19, where you can learn how to explore genealogy online. Many people who are blind or have low vision spend hours researching ancestry online. You could also get involved with a genealogy group.

### **Woodworking**

If woodworking is your favorite hobby, you don't have to quit using your power tools because you are losing your vision. Many woodworkers who are blind or have low vision safely perform woodworking tasks daily. Resources that can help you continue this rewarding pastime are listed in the Resources section.

You may already have many of the tools you need for woodworking, but you will need to buy measuring tools, like a click rule, modified for people with vision loss. You can also learn techniques for modifying your tools from experienced visually impaired woodworkers. Some state and private rehabilitation centers and veteran's administration rehabilitation centers offer woodworking training for people who are blind or have low vision as part of the rehabilitation curriculum. There are also woodworking reference books and audio recordings of woodworking publications made for people who are blind or have low vision.

### **Gardening**

Did you know that the French painter Monet was an avid gardener? He loved flowers almost as much as painting, and even when he lost most of

his vision, he did not stop painting or gardening. Your visual impairment does not have to spoil your gardening pleasure either.

Here are a few helpful tips:

- Using raised beds, containers, or pots creates boundaries to work within. They also make it easier to reach the soil and plants.
- Choose tools that are durable and lightweight. Brightly colored handles make them easier to see if you have low vision.
- Eke garden trowels have engraved markings to indicate soil depth, making it easier to determine how deep to plant bulbs and transplants.
- Keep both hands free by carrying tools in your carpenter's apron from your toolbox or get a gardener's apron.
- Plant vegetables in a row with the plants evenly spaced. Stake a rope across each row. Tie evenly spaced knots in each rope and plant a seed or transplant at each knot. Any plant not along the line is probably a weed.
- Seed tapes laid in a row are also good for maintaining rows. The tape will eventually dissolve, and your plants will be evenly spaced in a row.
- Plants not organized in rows should be labeled for identification if they are not familiar to you.

## **Adaptive Sports**

If you enjoy sports, you may find this section encouraging. Every two years, blind athletes from around the world compete in the Paralympics. In the 2016 summer games in Brazil, three blind runners in the Paralympics beat the finishing times of sighted runners who won medals in the same event in the Olympics. Some organizations support blind athletes in golf, skiing, bowling, sailing, track and field, swimming, and more. There are two sports—beep baseball and goalball—designed for blind athletes. Contact the United States Association of Blind Athletes at 719-866-3224 for information on adaptive sports and recreation for people who are blind or have low vision.

## Bowling

Bowling requires little or no adaptation for people who are blind or have low vision. Many bowling alleys have a portable guide rail that you can hold onto to help you with your approach and delivery, guiding you toward the pins. If you are on a team or a frequent bowler, you may want to purchase a lightweight guide rail that can be easily assembled and stored. Some bowling alleys will let you use color-contrasting sports tape and thin rope to create a long, thin, raised line down the center of the approach of a lane to ensure you are walking in a straight line toward the lane. This method allows you to move both your arms and legs during your approach. Some people use a sighted guide to help them line up where they want to execute their delivery. Some bowling alleys also have a ramp for people who have difficulty bending over to throw a ball.

A print copy of a chart showing the pin set-up can be helpful, especially if you are competitive. After you throw the first ball of each frame, a sighted person or someone with low vision who uses a monocular can use the chart to point out which pins are still standing. This chart helps you strategize where to throw the next ball for best results. If you aren't bowling in a league, you can ask the bowling alley to set up gutter bumpers.

## Golf

Blind golf is a popular sport, and many outstanding blind golfers are playing the game. How can you play golf if you can't see to hit the ball and can't see where it's going or landing? The adaptation allowed for blind golfers is limited assistance from a sighted coach.

A coach's primary duty is to help line up a blind player with the upcoming hole and help put the club directly behind the ball, so the blind person knows where the ball is and which direction to hit. Much like a caddy in regulation golf, a coach is allowed to describe the hole's characteristics, where hazards lie, the slope of the fairway or green, and areas the golfer should try to avoid. (Some golf instructors think that blind golfers don't need to know about hazards. They believe this information is an unnecessary distraction, but this is an individual preference of the blind golfer.). Once a coach has lined up the shot for a blind golfer, the shot's actual execution is

completely up to the golfer.

### **Skiing**

Alpine downhill skiing is a rare opportunity for a person who is blind or has low vision to move freely and independently, experiencing the exhilaration of speed. Cross-country skiing generally occurs on smaller slopes than downhill but is equally challenging. To safely meet these challenges, skiers who are blind or have low vision use a guide who describes the surroundings, chooses the line of descent, and provides verbal instructions. If the terrain has wide slopes and few obstacles, the guide may follow the skier, providing verbal descriptions and instructions. At other times, the skier will follow the outline of the guide's body and movements as the guide provides orientation and verbal instructions. A lightweight, portable amplification system can help the guide and skier stay in close communication.

### **Ski for Light**

Ski for Light is an organization that promotes cross-country (Nordic) skiing across the U.S. and the world. There is a major National Ski for Light event in the U.S. each year, and many states or regions of the country also have local events. These events bring together people who are blind or have low vision who want to learn to cross-country ski and experienced skiers. These events encourage participation from family and friends as well.

For both downhill and cross-country skiers:

- Enroll in a ski clinic for beginners or persons returning to the sport with a visual impairment.
- Use properly fitted ski equipment and clothing. Many ski resorts or clinics offer rental equipment.
- Ask your eye doctor about lenses or goggles that can help reduce glare when skiing. Lenses can be tinted in a range of colors to decrease various wavelengths of light that can cause glare.

## **Sports and Recreation Created for People who are Blind or Have Low Vision**



## **Beep Baseball**

The National Beep Baseball Association (NBBA) was organized in 1976 for adults who are blind or have low vision to play baseball. Each year, the NBBA coordinates local, state, and regional tournaments. Each August, the NBBA sponsors a national and international invitational tournament called the World Series of Beep Baseball.

Beep baseball is played on a grassy field with six fielders: a first baseman, a third baseman (there is no second base), shortstop, left and right-fielders, and center. The fielders and batter are blindfolded. Four other participants—pitcher, catcher, and two spotters—are usually sighted. The sighted spotters are out in the field and call out a number indicating which part of the field the ball is traveling. The middle of the outfield is number six, and the left and right sides are numbered one through five in a mirrored pattern. The left-field spotter calls for the left-field and the right-field spotter for the right. Each game is six innings unless there is a tied game at the end of inning six.

Beep baseball is different from regular baseball in a few ways. For example, the pitcher pitches to his or her teammates and throws the ball in such a way to help the batter hit a home run. The equipment includes an oversized softball with an embedded beeper. Just as the pitcher throws the ball, they pull a pin from the ball, activating the beeper. The bases emit buzzing sounds to orient runners.

## **Goalball**

Goalball is a team sport created specifically for people who are blind or have low vision in 1946 to help with rehabilitation for World War II veterans. Today, there are male and female goalball teams worldwide playing competitively and in the Paralympics. To play on a competitive goalball team, a person must be completely blind or have low vision. During a game, all players on the court must wear a blindfold, even if they are blind. Blindfolds level the playing field between low vision and completely blind athletes.

Goalball is played on a court similar to a basketball court's size, using a ball slightly larger than a basketball that contains bells so the athletes can hear



the ball. Each team has three players on the court at a time strategically placed at opposite ends of the court. The ball is pitched out on the floor like a bowling ball toward the opposing team's end of the court. The opposing team protects their end by stopping the ball with their bodies—torso, hands, feet, legs, etc. If the ball goes over the goal line into the end zone, the offensive team gets the point.

When the ball is "put into play," the defensive team goes into defense mode, usually on their knees. If necessary, they will throw their whole body in front of the ball to stop it. Balls can move at 35 miles per hour or even faster. Some Olympic athletes can throw the ball over 45 miles per hour. Because the players are protecting their end zone with every part of their bodies, they wear protective gear: knee and elbow pads, chest protectors, and sometimes even a face mask.

Because the players depend on their hearing to locate the ball's position and defend their end zone, spectators must be completely silent during play. In other words, there's no cheering when your team scores!

Olympic-level goalball players play at high speeds and with great intensity, but do not be intimidated. Goalball can be lots of fun at a much slower pace if you're not afraid of getting a bruise now and then. If you decide to join a team, talk with your eye doctor first. People with glaucoma or who are at risk for detached retinas should not participate in goalball.

## **Sports as a Spectator**

If you are an avid sports fan, you know you don't have to be an athlete to enjoy a baseball, basketball, football, or hockey game! Since losing your vision, have you been to see your favorite team play? If so, what accommodations did you make to enjoy the game to the fullest? If you have some usable vision, did you take binoculars or a monocular to watch the field or court? Did you choose seats so you could see the maximum amount of the field or court? Did a companion describe the action for you, or did you take a radio and earphones or use apps on your smartphone to listen to the play-by-play? All these suggestions are possibilities, and planning will ensure you have an enjoyable experience with an extremely

visual activity.

The Royal National Institute for the Blind in England works with Access Audio to ensure every soccer and rugby stadium has state-of-the-art equipment for broadcasting descriptive audio to people who are blind or have low vision. According to spectators who have used the equipment, the system provides great reception. These systems are portable and can be moved between venues.

Although accessibility in sports venues is not as common in the U.S., some larger arenas, like the American Airlines Center in Dallas, use an internal radio frequency to allow spectators to listen to the television feed on a portable radio. If your favorite sports arena or stadium does not provide accommodations, try using your best social assertiveness skills to inform the arena or stadium administration what is needed to ensure all fans enjoy the games.

## **Outdoor Recreation**

You need not go far from your back door to enjoy the fun of outdoor recreation.

### **Horseshoes**

A rousing game of horseshoes in your backyard can quickly lift the spirits of avid horseshoe players. Color contrast and a sound source can make horseshoes almost as much fun as ever. Look for a set of horseshoes that are rubber coated and larger than a standard set. To make the horseshoes easier to see, wrap yellow tape around one pair and another bright color, like orange, around the other pair. Do something similar to make the stakes easier to see. If you do not have enough vision to see the stake you are throwing to, put a sound source a short distance behind the stake. It should be close enough that you don't overshoot your target but not so close that it prevents you from getting a ringer!

### **Bicycling**

You may remember a very old song called "A Bicycle Built for Two." These days two-seat bicycles are called tandem bicycles, and they are a popular way of enjoying the outdoors. There are tour groups that arrange trips for

people who like to vacation on their tandem bicycles.

If you love riding your bike, but don't feel safe on the road since losing your vision, try a tandem bike. You will still get a great workout, you can maintain good speed, and you don't need to worry about a car coming between you and your riding partner. Usually, the team's sighted member (the pilot) sits on the front seat of the bike and communicates what's ahead. Your partner can also provide information about surface changes, obstacles, turns, upcoming hills, and when to brake. Your partner can also describe the scenery for you if you'd like.

The visually impaired cyclist usually sits in the back seat and is called "the stoker." You don't have the responsibility of steering, but if you want to get very far, you'd best not neglect your duty of helping to pedal. It takes some coordination to ride with another cyclist, so before you take off on an adventure, practice on quiet, straight roads with few inclines.

### **Fishing**

Fishing is a good pastime for anyone, regardless of how much sight you have. It is a relaxing, healthy, and affordable hobby that is accessible to all.

If you fish in calm waters, you may not need a device that lets you know there is a fish on the line. Learn through touch when a fish is pulling on your line. Pay attention to how your pole feels when there isn't a fish on your line. Ask a fishing buddy to watch and tell you when your bobber goes under so you will begin to recognize how your pole reacts when there's a fish after your bait. It doesn't hurt to jerk on your pole if you think there's a fish.

There are a few items you can prepare at home before you go fishing:

- Examine your equipment carefully. Get the feel of how everything works.
- Keep your tackle to a minimum and keep it well organized.
- Make sure you have a sharp penknife with your tackle.
- Tie set-ups in advance to use while fishing.
- Practice, if possible, putting on the kind of bait or lures you plan to use.

- Make sure you have a visor or hat, magnification devices, bug repellent, and good U.V. sunshades.
- Check out catalogs and angler shops for devices that might be helpful.

Once you arrive at your fishing site, get familiar with the environment so you can stay mobile but safe. Have another fisherman spot you when you cast. Always be aware of the location of your hook when it's not in the water.

In many parts of the U.S., groups offer fishing events for people who are blind or have low vision. Check out what's available in your region. The American Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind, as well as Lions Clubs and other service organizations in your area, may sponsor fishing trips for visually impaired people who love to fish.

If you are legally blind, you are entitled to a free fishing license in many states. To obtain this license, you will need a signature from your eye doctor or a professional from your local or state agency that serves individuals who are blind or have low vision. You can request an application through your state's Department of Fish and Game. These special licenses are not available at stores that sell regular fishing licenses. It will take some time to complete the process, so it is a good idea to plan.

## **Hiking**

The word "hiking" conjures up images of adventure, whether it's wandering a path of pine needles through the woods or trekking along a creek in the heart of a busy city. Hiking relieves stress, relaxes the mind, and brings a sense of refreshment. The beauty of hiking is not limited to people with sight. People who are blind or have low vision can enjoy a plethora of sounds, smells, and textures as they explore the hiking environment without the distraction of visual information. Count how many bird songs you hear. Listen for a gurgling stream or waterfall in the distance. Feel the air on your face, pine needles underfoot, the bark of a birch tree, or a giant knee of a cypress in the creek. In the spring, all the flowering bushes, plants, and trees can make your nose twitch.



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Preparing to hike includes taking precautions. It's safer to hike with another person, probably someone who is sighted, unless you limit your hiking to paved or gravel trails. Some enjoyable trails might have logs across the path or uneven, rocky stretches. People who are cane users may prefer to use a cane or hiking stick in one hand and hold onto one end of a short rope with the other hand, with their partner holding the other end. These tools will help you navigate changing elevations and rough terrain. With your white cane or hiking stick, you can detect a hole in the middle of the trail or avoid stumbling over a tree root. Your cane or hiking stick may detect an obstacle in the trail that your partner doesn't see. If you hike a lot, consider buying a pair of hiking sticks that are sturdier than a white cane and have spikes on the end to help with unsure footing. Don't forget to carry a water bottle, your phone for emergencies, sunscreen, insect repellent, and a small first aid kit.

Blind Outdoor Leisure Development (BOLD) is a terrific resource for people who are blind or have low vision who want to participate in outdoor activities. Like other regional organizations, the Appalachian Mountain Club organizes group hiking activities and encourages hikers to maintain local trails.

### **Birding by Ear**

Retired biologist Jerry Krummrich challenged himself to learn to identify birds by voice: "I recognized how much more enjoyment was to be obtained by knowing bird songs and calls because we hear so many more calls than we can see birds in the bushes and trees." Birding can be done from your back porch or on a hike through the woods. If you are blind or have low vision, singing birds in the morning are one way to know the sun is rising. Many birding guides are available that play the sounds of various birds with the push of a button.

If you are an avid hiker, adding birding to your outings can enrich your hikes. You can join the Audubon Society and get credit for identifying birds by their songs. This credit is the same that sighted people get for visually identifying different species of birds.



## **Camping**

In the past, you may have loved going to a campground, pitching a tent, setting up your food supply like Fort Knox to protect it from critters, and heading off to the creek to go fishing. Camping is still possible with a visual impairment. It takes very little adaptation because you probably won't be going alone, and the person going with you will likely have vision. You may need to organize your supplies more carefully than in the past and do a better job keeping track of everything. Food containers should be labeled. If you plan a menu and put items together by meal, you can eliminate rummaging through containers looking for what you need. Some of the other activities discussed in this lesson can add to your enjoyment of camping. For example, bring adapted games the group likes to play, go hiking, or spend time birding.

In addition to camping with sighted friends, there are camps created for people who are blind or have low vision that offer a wide variety of activities. Accessible retreats are also available.

If you are a national parks enthusiast and are legally blind, you are eligible for a free Access Pass. An Access Pass gives you and the other occupants of your car (or where there is a per person charge, up to 4 adults) free admission to all U.S. national parks, and the pass is valid for life. You will need a physician's statement or another document to verify your visual impairment. Contact the National Park Service for details or to apply.

## **Rigorous Outdoor Activities**

Wilderness Inquiry is an organization based in Minnesota that provides organized outings for outdoor activities. They cater to people with disabilities and their friends and families. They encourage all participant levels, from those who want to try outdoor activities for the first time to those experienced in outdoor adventures. There is a cost for these outings, which usually includes all major equipment needed for the activity, instructors and guides, food, and other needed supplies. If you are interested in hiking in the mountains, canoeing, kayaking, or dog sledding, this organization is worth checking out.



## **Exercise and Movement**

You can decrease your stress and boost your concentration, energy, physical flexibility, strength, balance, and endurance by doing just 10 minutes of physical activity per day. Anything that gets you moving has benefits, and once you start to feel results, you may be motivated to add another 10-minute block of physical activity. You don't have to go to the gym or participate in a programmed activity, although these are good choices if you can take part in them. Some normal daily activities provide enough physical activity to improve your physical fitness, like digging in the garden, scrubbing the bathtub, walking up and down the stairs in your house, doing a few squats, or touching your toes next to your computer while you take a break. If you'd like a planned activity without going to the gym, try yoga or Pilates with "eyes-free fitness" audio instruction from Blind Alive

If your current lifestyle is mostly sedentary, it's important to talk with your doctor before beginning an exercise regimen. You will want to discuss your eye condition and physical condition because some exercises should be avoided if you have glaucoma or other retinal diseases.

Many YMCAs, YWCAs, hospitals, and other community organizations offer free or low-cost exercise programs for seniors. One national program that has become popular in recent years is called SilverSneakers, and other similar programs may be available in your local area.

## **Summary**

In this lesson, we have discussed a variety of recreational activities. If you want to explore new ways to get moving or connect with an enjoyable recreational activity, you may be concerned that it's not possible for you with vision loss. Start small, try starting with just 10 minutes of exercise each day, reach out to a group of individuals who do the activity, or try applying some of the tips you have learned throughout these lessons, and keep reminding yourself that no matter your age, size, or physical condition, you need to start moving and participating in recreation again. Not only are exercise and healthy eating the most effective means of

protecting your body against chronic diseases, but they are the primary ways to build a strong body and ensure a long, active life. Finding meaningful activities will give you purpose and enjoyment in your life.

## **Suggested Activities**

Identify a hobby you haven't tried since your vision loss and try to do it.

- Ask your local blindness agency or look online for information about doing a hobby you enjoy with a vision impairment.
- Identify an activity that some of your friends or family members enjoy doing together and join them in that activity.
- Join a local peer support group or chapter of the American Council of the Blind or National Federation of the Blind and see what activities other people who are blind or have low vision are doing.

## **Resources**

- American Blind Bowling Association, Inc.
- American Council of the Blind
- Appalachian Mountain Club
- Audubon Society
- BARD
- Blind Alive
- Blind Golf
- Blind Outdoor Leisure Development (BOLD)
- The Hadley Institute
- Lions Clubs
- The National Beep Baseball Association
- National Federation of the Blind
- National Federation of the Blind-Newsline
- The National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled
- National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled Eligibility
- National Park Service
- Open Book
- SilverSneakers



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- Ski for Light
  - United States Association of Blind Athletes
  - Wilderness Inquiry
  - Woodworking for the Blind, Inc.