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**PROTECT YOUR INDEPENDENCE: FEBRUARY IS NATIONAL LOW VISION AWARENESS MONTH**  
*The Wisconsin Optometric Association encourages those affected to be proactive*

**MADISON, WI** - Low vision; what does that mean? According to the National Eye Institute, low vision is a visual impairment, not corrected by standard glasses or contact lenses, which interferes with the ability of almost 14 million Americans to perform everyday activities. The **Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA)** and its member doctors are eager to bring attention to the difficulties low vision can have on millions of Americans and educate those same individuals about ways to improve their day-to-day lives. Therefore, the WOA, along with the American Optometric Association (AOA), recognizes February as National Low Vision Awareness Month.

Most people develop low vision because of eye diseases, such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, or age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which is a leading cause of vision loss in Americans 60 years of age and older in the United States. Visual Impairment at any age can decrease an individual's mobility and self esteem. Although lost vision usually cannot be restored, it does not have to mean loss of independence or quality of life.

According to Dr. Jeff Sarazen, 2012 WOA President and Wausau optometrist, "Early diagnosis by an eye doctor is very important in treating low vision and preventing it from progression, especially if you have glaucoma, cataracts, diabetes, or AMD." WOA doctors encourage all adults, especially those who are noticing even slight changes in their vision, to visit their eye doctor each year as a preventative measure. "Being proactive about your eye health is an important step in preserving the future of your sight and your freedom," asserts Dr. Sarazen.

In addition to visiting your eye doctor on a routine basis, the WOA recommends everyone practice a healthy lifestyle including proper diet, exercise, and, of course, no smoking. Following these suggestions, as well as taking antioxidant vitamins C, E, A, and Zinc, may also help reduce your risk of vision loss.

"Low vision does not have to diminish a person's quality of life," says Dr. Sarazen. There are many low vision aids and resources available, as well as continuous research and treatments. The Wisconsin Optometric Association, along with many others, recognizes February as Low Vision Awareness Month.

If you have any questions, please contact the Wisconsin Optometric Association at 608-824-2200 or visit [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org) for a list of licensed optometrists in your area.

*The Wisconsin Optometric Association (WOA) is a nonprofit affiliation of licensed doctors of optometry and associated businesses dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of the vision welfare of the people of Wisconsin. The WOA accomplishes its goals through: education and dissemination of information, organized governmental activity, legislation and regulation, mediation with consumer and public interest groups, and provision of collective benefits to its members. Approximately 640 doctors of optometry are currently members of the WOA, located in nearly every county in the state. All members must be licensed to practice optometry by the State of Wisconsin. For more information, visit WOA's website at [www.woa-eyes.org](http://www.woa-eyes.org).*