

## Thriving with One Eye

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Most people will say that total blindness is one of the most dreaded medical conditions one could ever confront, but what about the loss of only one eye? There are many instances in which a patient loses an eye either due to injury or disease. How does one deal with that?

This is somewhat like driving a car that has already had one flat and now is being driven on the spare tire. That driver will be particularly cautious about how he drives and in what conditions. The same should hold true for a one-eyed person.

Extra caution should be taken to protect the remaining eye from injury. Even if one does not ordinarily need to wear glasses, it is recommended that special “safety” glasses be worn. These are regular glasses with impact-resistant lenses and with frames that are sturdy yet stylish.

One should avoid sports that involve the risk of eye injury, such as racquetball, and should likewise avoid occupations that are risky, such as welding. It is advisable to see an eye-care professional at least once yearly to monitor the health of the remaining eye. If the other eye was lost due to disease, it is important to control the underlying problem that might have triggered the loss, such as diabetes or hypertension.

One of the most difficult aspects of losing an eye is the loss of depth perception. A person with one eye will have difficulty judging curb heights or pouring drinks and must use other visual clues to develop a method to compensate for this loss. Also, when driving, it is important to turn one’s head to the affected side in order to compensate for the loss of peripheral vision.

Literature has many examples of one-eyed characters who have compensated and thrived. In mythology, the Norse god Wotan (Odin) got his power from the fact that he had immense knowledge, but in order to gain this knowledge he had to sacrifice an eye. He took a drink from the Spring of Wisdom, which flowed at the base of the cosmic tree, paying for the drink with one of his eyes.

In Greek mythology, Odysseus and his crew, while sailing back home after leaving Troy, came to the island of the Cyclopes, a wild race of one-eyed giants. A huge Cyclops named Polyphemus imprisoned them and threatened to eat them one by one, but they escaped after they stabbed him with a long olive pole in his only eye, blinding him. (I guess he wasn’t wearing protective glasses!)

The movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* featured a spaceship that was controlled by an infamous one-eyed computer named HAL. Analogous to the one-eyed god Wotan mentioned previously, this computer was “all-knowing.” With its one eye, HAL was able to lip-read what the astronauts were whispering and then made an attempt to override what they had planned. (By the way, did you know that HAL’s name is formed by using the three letters that precede IBM in the alphabet?)

Luckily, Mother Nature allowed for some built-in redundancy by designing the human body with two eyes. The loss of one eye is not as onerous as the loss of two, and indeed one can thrive quite well with one eye as long as adjustments are made and precautions are taken.