



Large print

Managing sight loss: advice for everyday living

Fact sheet 1b: Low vision aids

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Low vision aids – what you need to know

- Low vision optical aids are lenses that can magnify or increase a person's usable field of vision. Some can be held in the hand, some clip on to your glasses, others are mounted permanently into spectacle frames. Some lenses improve near or distant vision, some help decrease glare.
- In general, the amount of detail you can see (your level of visual acuity) will determine whether or not a particular low vision optical aid will be helpful to you. People with 6/60 or greater acuity can usually read headlines in a newspaper without glasses or lenses.
- Using magnifiers, however, requires a change in your reading habits and time is needed to get used to these changes.
- Magnifying glasses that are worn just like regular spectacles have a short focusing distance and, therefore, reading material has to be held very close to the eye.
- However, hand-held magnifiers, generally, allow reading material to be held further away. The better the basic vision, the less magnification is required and the larger the magnifier can be. This allows more print to be seen at one time, making reading easier and faster. The same principle applies to magnifying glasses.
- In reverse, the more magnification that is required, the smaller the magnifier and the fewer words that will be seen at one time. This cuts down on reading speed and scanning ability.

- Closed circuit television sets (CCTVs) also provide electronic magnification of images and written material. These devices, however, are usually expensive. Portable units can be cheaper.
- People who can see only shadows, who cannot see the largest letter on the vision chart, or who can see only the largest newspaper headlines, generally do not achieve reading vision good enough to read newspapers or magazines, even with magnifying glasses or magnifiers. Unfortunately, in these cases, the magnification required severely limits the field of vision. In practice, this means only a limited number of letters can be seen at one time and the reader is forced to move letter by letter to make out the words. Although this can make reading very slow and cumbersome, it may be useful for certain activities like reading bills or other important documents.
- For pleasure and informational reading, recorded materials may provide a better alternative than magnifying devices. This includes books and other materials recorded on tape. These are available at your local library and through other sources.
- Adults and children who have significant difficulty reading print can now borrow audiovisual items free of charge from their local library. Ask at your local library about the Access Card.
- To find out which low vision aids can help you, talk to your consultant. He or she may want to perform a low vision assessment and help you explore low vision aids or refer you to someone else who knows more about

them. This can often be a specialist low vision optometrist and is often offered in general optometrist practices, such as those available in shopping centres. This part of a low vision assessment concentrates on optical aids, but it is important to be aware that many non-optical aids can also help. See our factsheets about colour and contrast for further details.

- One of the challenges of adjusting to sight loss is that so much needs to be relearned – and this is time-consuming and can require patience.

