

Living with

Some simple steps to make everyday tasks easier for those with low vision.

low vision



Did you know that every day, some 250 people start to lose their sight? Or that more than two million people in the UK are living with sight loss that is severe enough to have a significant impact on their daily lives?

Low vision, otherwise known as visual impairment, is when your sight can't be corrected with glasses or contact lenses, or by medical or surgical treatment.

Low vision is more common in older people and is becoming more prevalent as the population of the UK ages.

Jo Holmes, Deputy President of the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), explained: "Sight loss affects people of all ages, but as we get older, we are increasingly likely to experience sight loss. One in five people aged 75 and over are living with sight loss.

"People suffering from low vision can show a range of signs. One early sign might be struggling to read small print on instructions or food packages. This is a sign that you (or your loved one) should go for an eye test. It may be simply that you need new or updated specs! Common causes of sight loss, such as cataract, can be treated. Some people will find their low vision is due to conditions such as age related macular degeneration (AMD); research is still trying to find treatments for this condition but there are many things that can be done to help too."

Other signs of low vision include colours looking washed out, squinting to see things, bumping or knocking into things, finding it difficult to judge the depth of steps or kerbs and straight lines that look wobbly (this is a sign of AMD) and difficulty driving at night.

First steps

If you think your vision is changing, it's important you have a regular eye test every two years, unless advised otherwise,

and if you are diagnosed with vision impairment that cannot be corrected, your dispensing optician can advise on strategies to make the most of the vision you do have.

Jo advised: "Think bigger, bolder, brighter and this will help you adapt your living environment and make it easier to do everyday tasks. Things are easier to see if they are bigger. A magnifier can help with this but surprisingly the most powerful magnifiers are the smallest!

"Using a bold felt tip to write notes is much easier to read than a biro. Ask for bills and letters to be sent in large print; this option is on offer from most utility companies, banks and health services. If you struggle using the phone, check out resources like the RNIB shop; you can find phones with large numbers on large buttons, as well as watches with large clear numbers, easy to see kitchen scales, and large print games like scrabble".

FURTHER SUPPORT

If you need further support, your dispensing optician can advise on how to live well with low vision and signpost you to vision services in your area.

National charities offering low vision services includes:

- ★ Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) helpline: 0303 123 9999.
- ★ Macular Society helpline: 0300 3030 111.
- ★ International Glaucoma Association helpline: 01233 64 8170.
- ★ Blind Veterans UK: 0800 389 7979.
- ★ Royal Society for Blind Children family support services: 020 3198 0210.

MY SIGHT NOTTINGHAM OFFERS LIFE HACKS AND TECH TIPS FOR THOSE WITH LOW VISION

- 1 Colour contrast**
Good colour contrast throughout your home helps you use and identify objects. Use bright colours that stand out and contrast with pale colours, such as red crockery on a white work surface or dark brown sofa with a cream carpet.
- 2 Let there be light**
Lighting which is even, consistent and positioned correctly is important. Maximise natural daylight by removing net curtains and reduce glare on polished surfaces like tables with a cloth.
- 3 Drink safely**
Fill your cup safely using a liquid level indicator, which sits on the side of your cup and beeps or vibrates when the liquid is close to the top. One cup water machines are another great solution as they dispense exactly the amount of water needed. As a stop-gap solution, try using a clean ping pong ball!
- 4 Everything in its place**
Try to keep objects in the same place, especially keys needed to get out in an emergency. If you live with others, explain the importance of not moving things around.
- 5 Buy Bump-ons**
These cheap adhesive tactile bumps are fantastic and easy to use. They stick to most surfaces from keypads to cooker dials and even on your front door to highlight the lock!

TECH TIPS

- ★ **Seeing AI:** This free app uses artificial intelligence (AI) to describe people, places and things, you can use it to find the next bus or read your mail or food packaging.
- ★ **BeMyEyes:** A free app that matches a visually impaired user with a sighted volunteer through live video connection. Ask a human being almost anything, from reading the best before date on food to help with navigating an unfamiliar area, or simply ask 'what on earth is this?'
- ★ **BlindSquare:** An accessible GPS app that helps you navigate the environment, helping you plan your route or find the nearest restaurant.
- ★ **iDentifi:** This free app uses AI to help you click on a photo and get a description; it describes colours and facial expressions.
- ★ **Amazon Echo and Google Home:** These voice-controlled assistants can be used for almost anything; selecting a radio channel, controlling your central heating and even keeping you entertained with jokes!

For advice on equipment and technology contact info@mysightnotts.org.uk or find your nearest sight loss charity at www.visionary.org.uk/memberlist