

# Guide to Living with Vision Impairment



SupportSight  
Foundation

*“Once I stopped fighting it and accepted help,  
my life transformed.”*

- Charlie Collins  
Living with AMD for 40 years  
International Inspirational Speaker

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# Guide to Living with Vision Impairment

*“It is always good to understand the problem, but we believe it is more important to find the solution.”*

Dawn Prall, Executive Director

We created this guide to be a resource for patients, families and caregivers. The information was contributed by highly respected, experienced professionals in the low vision field. The devices mentioned are accessible and generally available through larger manufacturers, dealers, and eye care professionals.

Life is driven by accomplishing tasks, whether they be leisurely, like reading the gardening magazine you love, or purposeful, like balancing your checkbook. No matter where you are on the vision impairment spectrum, newly-diagnosed with macular degeneration or living with the advanced stages, this guide will help start you on a journey to more independence and freedom.

## 1. Make what you want to see larger

There are 3 types of magnification:

- a. **Relative Distance Magnification** – object brought closer to the eye.  
*Example:* sit closer to the TV
- b. **Relative Size Magnification** – object made larger. *Example:* large print books, large print checks, larger TV
- c. **Angular Magnification** – object not changed in position or size, but an optical system is placed between the object and the eye making the object appear larger. *Example:* hand magnifier, telescope, electronic magnification



**PORTABLE MAGNIFIERS** - Useful for reading outside of the home – shopping, dining out, thermostat and microwave controls – not the best product for reading a book or newspaper.

**Price Range:** \$50-\$250, for non-digital, \$300-\$1,400, for digital

This category begins with small handhelds and increases to more extensive digital magnifiers with large screens. This is a good place to start for someone needing a small amount of magnification. The digital magnifiers are a relatively new category, and offer many options. They are a good next step after the smaller fixed magnifiers and can provide a wide range of options; adjustable magnification, different foreground and background color combinations, line markers, and the ability to download to a larger monitor or a computer.

## 2. Increase task illumination

- Use gooseneck lamps, flashlights and illuminated magnifiers
- Use task lamps and daylight bulbs
- Bring lighting within one foot of the print you are reading

## 3. Decrease glare

- Decrease glare from lighting, windows and the sun
- Use amber or yellow tints to cut glare and enhance contrast

## 4. Enhance contrast between what you want to see and its surroundings

Most people with visual impairment see better if objects are black and white.

*Example:* you can see black coffee in a white coffee mug.

- Do not use heavily decorated plates
- Do not use clear glasses or dishes – it's hard to see them!

**CCTVS OR VIDEO MAGNIFIERS - Ideal for Basic Daily Living – reading the mail, bills, newspapers, magazines, books and writing checks**

**Price Range: \$2,000-\$4,000**

These devices have been around since 1970 and remain the easiest and most popular devices for basic reading. All of these devices utilize a large video monitor with a moveable reading surface. They have automatic focus and are offered in color and in black and white. Because of the larger screen size and widely adjustable magnification, they are ideal for basic daily living.



**FLEX-ARM VIDEO MAGNIFIERS - Useful for knitting, crocheting, hobbies & crafts**

**Price Range: \$1,800-\$2,800**

The flex-arm systems are similar to CCTVs but are more compact. The camera is located above the monitor on a flexible arm that can be moved into different positions. Best if used for reading, viewing something across the room, or self-viewing tasks. They do not have internal lighting or an X-Y Table.

## 5. Make sure you are using the right product with the correct magnifying power for the task – not all magnifiers are the same

- Using the wrong magnifying power will not help you
- Have your eye doctor prescribe the correct magnifier, eyeglasses or telescope for reading or for a specific task

## 6. Learn to use your magnification products correctly

This takes practice and patience!

## 7. Low vision glasses or products are often task specific

It's important to realize you may need more than one low vision aid to accomplish all tasks.

**WEARABLE GLASSES** - Good for reading documents and, in some cases, product recognition

**Price Range: \$2,500-\$10,000**

Wearable Glasses is a new category of devices that is at the forefront of development. They look like regular glasses, but have video screens on the inside that will focus on a document or newspaper in your hand. In some cases, they can scan that document and read it back to you. Currently, there are three manufacturers of these products. Two companies make glasses with video screens and these models are priced higher. One company makes a device that is audio only and has facial recognition as well as product recognition.

## 8. Learn to use your eyes more efficiently

Learn to use the peripheral part of the retina. You can learn to move your body into positions where it is easier to use your peripheral vision.

## 9. Substitute “ears for eyes”

- a. Enjoy audio books and magazines
- b. Use talking watches, clocks, calculators, scales, glucometers and computer software



**AUDIO DEVICES** - Ideal for reading printed material and books aloud

**Price Range: \$1,700-\$4,000**

For people with severe AMD or other eye conditions, sometimes magnification will not be effective. In these cases, an audio device that can scan and read your printed documents may be your best option. Since their invention, these products have become smaller, faster, and less costly. They will not read handwriting, but they will read most printed material and also read in different languages and voices. They can be used for a flat, whole printed page as well as a book turned sideways.

Several manufacturers have combined the CCTV with the audio component to allow for magnification, scanning and reading. The flex-arm version of this, combines magnification, scanning & reading, distance and self-viewing all in the same product.

**COMPUTER-RELATED DEVICES** – Ideal for using with your computer - your email and Facebook

**Price Range: \$1,800-\$3,000**

These small cameras attach to a computer to view documents, both near and far, as well as capture these documents and read them back to you in an audio voice. Some products can read at a distance with audio capability. There are also computer magnification programs such as ZoomText, Magic and JAWS that will help make your PC easier to read. The camera devices are perfect for small spaces.



## 10. Be your own Advocate

- a. Tell friends and family you are visually impaired and ask that they introduce themselves when approaching you. *"Hi Alice, it's Millie. Are you ready for dinner?"*
- b. Ask for large print menus at restaurants
- c. Use large print checks from your bank
- d. Become familiar with community resources such as low vision support groups, transportation services, aging services and recreational programs

### Do not become dependent on others!

Purchase low vision aids and learn to do things differently in order to become more independent. YOU CAN DO IT!

### *I want to take the next step towards independence, but how do I procure these products?*

First and foremost, get a Low Vision Evaluation from a qualified Low Vision Optometrist or Low Vision Ophthalmologist. This specific examination includes a demonstration of numerous devices to determine which device would be best for both your eye condition and task.

If and when you decide to buy a device, only deal with proven manufacturers and make sure to ask about their Return Policy; trade-in program for older devices; and their service and support or training. It also makes sense to ask about any used equipment available, but keep in mind in this case a warranty is very important. These policies are very important when buying higher priced devices.

### Product Purchases:

1. Have specific tasks in mind
2. Get a proper evaluation from a low vision specialist
3. **NEVER** buy anything on the Internet
4. Find a local professional who specializes in low vision devices
5. Make sure to take your time with the procurement of any device

**We are happy to help you!**

**Call 888.681.8773**  
**Visit [support sight.org](http://support sight.org)**

### *Thank you to our Contributors*



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