

Low vision aids

Support throughout central vision loss

Magnifiers and other devices that can help you make the best use of your vision

**No one need face macular degeneration alone.
For information and support call 0300 3030 111.**

Being diagnosed with a macular condition can leave you worrying about how you will cope with everyday tasks. You will be concerned about losing your independence and not being able to enjoy activities like reading.

However, having macular disease needn't mean losing control of your life. There is plenty of support available from professional services and a growing range of equipment called 'low vision aids'.

Devices like magnifiers, tablets and phones,

as well as large print products, can help you make the best use of your vision and ensure life runs as smoothly as possible.

You may find that things take a little longer but, by learning some new techniques, you can have a good quality of life.

Low vision aids and services

These include:

- magnifiers (optical low vision aids that incorporate lenses)
- products which use colour or contrast to

make them easier to see and use, or are bigger than standard

- large print products.

Items such as reading stands, anti-glare spectacles and task lights can help. Leisure products, like large print playing cards, scrabble and dominos, are available.

Resource centres

Your local society for the visually impaired may have a demonstration kitchen or resource centre with a display of useful equipment such as talking watches, large print address books

and task lights. Larger centres may have high-tech items such as electronic magnifiers, talking scanners, accessible mobile phones and talking microwaves.

If it is not possible to visit a resource centre, there are many low vision aid suppliers who sell directly to individuals.

Call our helpline
0300 3030 111 for
further information.

Many useful items are available in non-specialist high street shops. These include brightly coloured cups,

multicoloured chopping board packs, big button phones, large clocks and kitchen timers.

Low vision clinics

Make use of all the services that are available to you including:

- local Social Services sensory impairment teams, which provide information about support and offer practical advice on daily living skills such as preparing food and getting out and about safely
- a low vision assessment, which will help you decide

whether items like magnifiers will be beneficial for you. Your GP, optometrist or ophthalmologist can refer you for an assessment.

If you are not sure how to find your nearest low vision service, ask your eye care professional. Our helpline can give you the locations of sensory impairment teams.

Get comfortable

If you can maintain a comfortable, natural upright posture while using magnifiers, CCTVs and other low vision

aids you will be able to see and do more.

Use:

- a clipboard to give you a flat firm surface when using a magnifier which you can bring close to the eye



- an adjustable lightweight table that can be pulled up to an armchair and

raise items to a more comfortable height

- cushions to support your arms while holding the magnifier and object.

If you choose to sit at a table, it is natural to rest an item on it and lean over to use a magnifier. However, this will be uncomfortable after a while for your neck and back and your head will block the light.

A reading or small drawing board will enable you to sit upright at the table.

Using magnifiers will not damage your eyes

although you will get tired if using them for any length of time. Little and often is the best approach.

When we are concentrating, we forget to blink which blurs the vision and the eyes become gritty and uncomfortable.

Every few minutes look away from the text or screen, blink a few times and then go back to it.

Magnifiers – optical low vision aids

Magnifiers increase the image size of an

object using a lens. They will never make it as easy to read as it was before the onset of macular disease, but they can help.

They are available either as a single lens system, such as a handheld magnifier, or a multiple lens system, such as a telescopic monocular.

Request a referral for a low vision assessment as soon as you experience difficulty with tasks like reading that cannot be rectified with ordinary spectacles and good lighting. It is easier to learn to use magnifiers

with relatively low powers, so the sooner you start the better.

A low vision clinic will advise you about levels of magnification and what you will need.

In general it is recommended to use the lowest level of magnification to carry out the task comfortably. Then you will have a larger lens, longer working distance and a wider field of view.

Types of magnifier

Handheld magnifiers

This is the most familiar style. The lens is held away from the object

and the device has a handle. Many handheld magnifiers have built-in lighting. Some are pocket-size – particularly useful for shopping and other outdoor tasks. Handheld devices are available in a wide range of magnification.

Stand magnifiers

These are designed to stand on the page, lens uppermost. This maintains the correct distance between the lens and the text. Stand magnifiers might be helpful if your hands are a little shaky. They are available in a wide



Stand magnifier

range of magnification. Some low-powered options have a deep enough stand to fit a pen underneath for writing.

Some stand magnifiers have inbuilt illumination. They can be plugged into an electrical socket or fitted with batteries.

Brightfield / flat-form magnifiers

These are bar or dome

magnifiers that look a bit like a paperweight or a shaped ruler. The magnifier is placed flat on the page and you slide it across to read a line of text. They are only available in lower levels of magnification but it is possible to combine them with other magnifiers. For example, a handheld magnifier can be used



A flat-form magnifier

to look at the enlarged image seen through the flat-form version.

A bar magnifier only enlarges in one direction, so letters are taller but the width of the text is unchanged. This enables several words to be seen at one time.

Round-the-neck magnifiers

These low-powered magnifiers are useful for hobbies like knitting where you need to have your hands free. They are only available in lower levels of magnification.

If you don't need a higher magnification to read or if the print

you are looking at is quite large, they can be used for reading, but you must keep the lens and your eyes still and move the text.

Binoculars and monoculars

These have been especially designed for people with low vision. They are smaller and lighter than ordinary telescopic systems and can be used for short periods. Monoculars are for use with one eye and binoculars are for use with both eyes.

They can be useful for tasks and activities like

reading bus numbers and notice boards or visiting the theatre. Binoculars can only be used for distance tasks but most monoculars can be used for distance and near vision activities (from about 15cm).

Monoculars have many uses but operating them takes longer to master. Your low vision service may be able to help by lending you distance units free of charge and demonstrating how to use them.

Magnifiers in a spectacle frame

Magnifiers in spectacle frames are not the

same as ordinary spectacles. They simply magnify objects rather than correcting short or long-sightedness. These devices are designed for near vision, either using both eyes or a high-powered single lens (much thicker and heavier than ordinary spectacle lenses).

The advantage is you have two hands free and do not have to hold the magnifier, the disadvantage is the working distance is much shorter than a hand or stand magnifier of the same power. You will need to bring the object very close to

your eyes for the magnifier to be in focus.

For distance and intermediate tasks, bespoke multi-lens telescopic systems are available and can be made to your prescription and measurements. These can only be dispensed by an optometrist or a dispensing optician.

The type of magnifier you need depends on the task, how long it takes to complete and whether you are looking at near or distance objects.

For example:

- a larger, lower powered, handheld

lens is good for reading larger print items, or for looking at photographs.

- a high-powered lens is good for looking at very small print
- a small telescope could be useful for seeing bus numbers and street signs.

Portability and lighting conditions are also important. You may need several magnifiers to do different things. A low vision assessment will help you find the most suitable and should be able to provide magnifiers on a long-term loan

so you can try them at home.

If you would like specific technical advice about magnifiers or similar equipment call the helpline 0300 3030 111.

Please note:

All magnifiers have certain distortions and irregularities that can never be completely eliminated.

Avoid sheet magnifiers, including screens which claims to magnify a television or a computer screen. They are unlikely to be of use to anyone with a macular condition.

Tips for using a magnifier

- Bring the lens close to the eye (not arm's length) and then bring the object towards the lens until it is in focus. This will give a wider field of view i.e. more of the word at a time than just one or two letters.
- Unless the magnifier has a low power you will only be able to use it with one eye. Where possible use it with the eye that has the best vision.
- If the image appears upside down when you look through the magnifier, the

- distance between the object and the magnifier is too great – bring the object closer to the eye.
- When using a handheld or stand magnifier keep any movement slow and even to minimise the chance of losing your place.
 - The centre of the lens gives the clearest, least distorted image. Do not read across the lens as the image will distort towards the edges.
 - Make the first word as clear as possible. Once you have located your best viewing position,

keep your head, eyes and the magnifier still, and move the object of your focus. This is known as Steady Eye Strategy. For more information about this technique, call the helpline on 0300 3030 111.

Typoscopes

Typoscopes are simple but useful tools. They are often made of black card and plastic with holes cut in them to act as a guide when reading or writing.

The surround screens out excess information and glare, allowing you

to concentrate on the area of particular interest.

There are many pre-cut typoscopes available, but some people prefer to make their own from black card, cutting the slot to their preferred shape and size and according to the task to be performed. For example, the width of a newspaper column and a couple of inches deep is a good size for reading newspaper articles.

Signature and cheque book guides are a form of typoscope. Signature and envelope address guides are available

from the RNIB or other low vision retailers. Cheque book guides should be available on request from your bank or building society.

Electronic low vision devices

There are many different types and models of electronic magnifying device. These incorporate a camera and the image is sent electronically to a viewing screen. Many have controls which can alter contrast, enhance or reverse colours and adjust focus and magnification levels.

Video magnifiers

These are also known as closed circuit television (CCTV) magnifiers. An object or text is placed beneath a camera and the image is projected into a TV screen or built-in monitor. The larger table-top devices can achieve very high levels of magnification, although they can be heavy and take up a lot of room.

Other devices may have a handheld camera which will slide over the text. This can be useful if looking at objects with a slightly curved surface such as a thick book where the text curves towards the spine.

Portable devices have a built-in camera and screen and can help you to read with greater flexibility. However, because of the screen size you see only a small area of text.

Electronic devices are not generally available on loan from a low vision service.

Many people are using the inbuilt cameras of their smartphone or tablet as a magnifier and CCTV reader.

Researching and choosing your electronic device

These can be expensive

so give careful thought to your needs before you buy. They tend to be useful for things like reading food packets and letters, looking at photographs and other activities in short bursts, but it's unrealistic to expect to be able to read a book for long periods.

Have a think about what tasks you would like to use it for and try it out before buying. Less expensive devices may have less functionality and options like colour changes, but might be ideal for you.

Many local societies for the visually impaired have a small selection

of electronic low vision aids for you to look at and may be able to lend you one for a short period.

Another option is visiting a low vision exhibition where manufacturers display their products. There are national events like Sight Village in Birmingham and London and regional exhibitions organised by local societies.

Be careful about impulse purchases at an exhibition – ask for contact details and make a decision when you have had time to consider your options.

Often retailers are happy to arrange a demonstration in your home.

Consider whether they offer a trial period and what service and support options are available.

Lighting

Good, well positioned task lighting can make a real difference to the way you use your vision and can make life easier.

People are often pleasantly surprised by the benefits of good lighting. It often means you can reduce the level of magnification

you need to see a particular size of print. For more information see our Lighting leaflet MS013.

Further information

Audio or tactile items aren't covered in this leaflet as technically they are not counted as low vision aids. This is because they are about vision substitution rather than using remaining vision.

However, you can find information on many types of equipment and ideas for making life easier in our leaflets

Daily Living Skills, Using Technology and our factsheet Large Print and Audio Publications. Call the helpline on 0300 3030 111. You can also download audio versions from our website www.macularsociety.org/resources.

How we help

We are the national charity for anyone affected by central vision loss. We provide free information and support to improve lives today. We fund research so that one day we can overcome macular disease.

You don't have to be a Society member to use the following services.

Helpline – We offer confidential advice and information on all aspects of macular disease, including diagnosis, treatment and living with central vision loss.

0300 3030 111

Monday to Friday

9am – 5pm

help@

macularsociety.org

Counselling – It's natural to feel upset or angry when you're told you have a macular condition. Many people find it helps to talk, in

confidence, to a professional counsellor.

Support Groups – We have a network of almost 300 local groups.

Befriending – Having a macular condition can leave you feeling isolated. Your dedicated befriender will call regularly for a friendly, social chat about anything you like including, but not always, macular disease.

Advocacy – We offer help to those struggling to access treatments.

Skills for Seeing – Our training programme can help you make best use of remaining sight.

Join us

If you would like to receive regular updates about treatments, living with macular conditions and medical research to find a cure, then membership is for you.

To join today call

01264 350 551

**info@
macularsociety.org**

and help us campaign for better care and fund research to find a cure.

**www.macular
society.org**

Macular conditions cause more than half of all blindness in Britain. We urgently need to find a cure and you can help today. We are the only UK charity dedicated to funding research into macular disease.

To help us find a cure and support people with macular conditions text VIEW30 followed by £3, £5 or £10 to 70070.

To donate more than £10 please visit www.macularsociety.org

There is no additional fee for your text. JustTextGiving will not give your telephone number to the Macular Society. Please ask the bill payer for permission before texting.



Macular Society

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