Contrast, Lighting and Glare

There are many simple things that can be done to make life with sight loss a bit easier and safer. Poor lighting and glare reduces remaining vision but this can be helped by:

➜ making better use of colour contrast
➜ making better use of lighting
➜ protecting the eyes from glare

“Learning about lighting and glare made a big difference to me. I now control the daylight using the blinds and curtains and use task lamps for reading, cooking and doing crosswords. I think we could all use light better.” Graham
Making better use of colour contrast in your home

Sometimes people lose the ability to see colours and tones making it difficult to distinguish things. You can help this by use of contrast colours for example:

➜ paint “nosings” on stair edges
➜ paint doors so they stand out from the colour of the wall
➜ avoiding busy patterns on walls, carpets and furniture
➜ preparing dark coloured food on a light chopping board (and vice versa)
➜ white crockery on a dark non-slip mat (and vice versa)
➜ change electronic text to white on black
➜ use a typoscope (a piece of dark card with a window cut out) to mask the page, revealing a little text at a time

Making better use of lighting in the home

Good lighting is important in older age and for people with sight loss. It will help you to have the right kind of light, in the right position so that the glare from the light source does not counteract the benefit of the light.

Natural daylight provides the best light for getting around inside your home, but after dark, in the winter months or in dark areas, artificial lighting is needed. To avoid trips and falls in halls and stairways, good lighting is particularly important and light switches should be at the top and bottom of every flight.

Bare bulbs can cause glare which is not good, so it is important to diffuse the light – paper globes and uplighters can help. So as the light is not too bright or too dim, make sure to use the correct wattage. Spotlights give out a bright pool of light but the surrounding area is left dark, so it is best not to use them. Dimmer switches can be fitted to control lighting.
Lighting for reading or close up work

For close up tasks such as reading or crafts, additional lighting is useful. The general rule for lighting a task is to have the lamp positioned below eye level, between you and the object you are viewing. Move your lamp around and place it where shadows don’t fall on your work. Remember – take care that the lamps do not overheat! For prolonged use a cooler fluorescent or LED bulb is best.

“I struggled to read and would buy the most powerful light bulbs I could. Visibility explained to me that even a low power lamp would do the job if it was positioned correctly.” Kenneth

Managing Glare and Reflection

Glare can make you uncomfortable and reduce your useful vision. It can also sometimes confuse you. So it is important to position lights in a way that they do not cause glare. Remember it takes time for your eyes to adjust between light and dark areas – don’t rush!

To help with glare in your home:

→ use blinds or curtains to control daylight as sunlight shining into a room can obscure things

→ rather than spotlights which can cause deep shadows, use lightshades, uplighters or paper ball shades

→ position lights so that you cannot see the bulb but it still shines brightly – you don’t want it shining in your eyes

→ use tinted paper rather than white and avoid gloss or sheen as glare from paper can make it hard to read

→ avoid highly polished floor and table surfaces as reflective surfaces can make it difficult to see

→ when outside it can help to wear a broad brimmed hat, peaked cap or visor and CE marked sunglasses

→ use UV shields such as clip-on UV/blue light filters or fit-over wraparound sunglasses to help with glare outside
Confused about Bulbs and Tubes?

Advances in lighting technology mean you can buy much better bulbs which provide light similar to that of a daylight lamp.

**LED bulbs** – the term ‘lumens’ is used to measure brightness and a 12W LED bulb is the equivalent of the old 100W tungsten filament bulb.

**Fluorescent tubes and compact bulbs** provide a bright light and some energy saving advantages, but they can take a few minutes to become bright. They usually provide a softer light.

**Halogen bulbs** give very bright concentrated light and cause glare as well as becoming very hot – so avoid them if you can.

Visibility is your local sight loss charity and runs a wide range of services across the west of Scotland. We rely on donations to keep our vital services going. To find out how you can help, please get in touch.

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