

R N I B

See differently

Starting Out

Making the most of your sight



RNIB Connect Radio Freeview 730



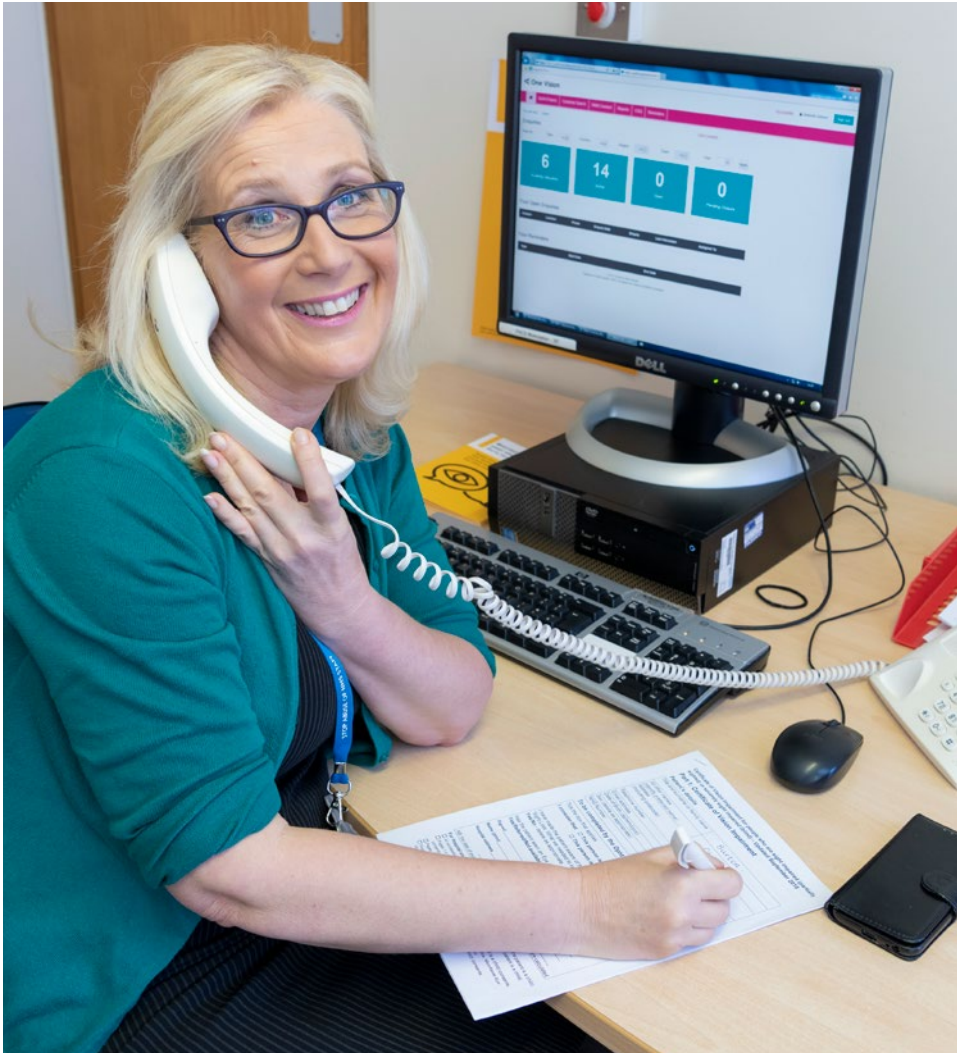
Shop at: rnib.org.uk/shop



Donate at: rnib.org.uk/donate

Sight Advice FAQ's

Ask the Sight Advice FAQ website your questions about sight loss, and get helpful answers:sightadvicefaq.org.uk



Contents

- 5** About this booklet
- 6** Low vision assessments
- 11** How can I make the most of my sight?
- 24** Technology
- 26** Other products that can help
- 28** Glossary
- 30** Further information
- 32** RNIB Booklet Series



About this booklet

This booklet aims to give you tips on how to make the most of your sight and organisations that provide further support.

If you have low or reduced vision, you can make things bigger, brighter and bolder by using magnification, increasing print size, by using the right lighting and using contrasting colours and clear designs. Some of these visual aids and more can be attained by low vision assessments with an optometrist or a low vision specialist which will be explained further in this publication.

For any questions, further information or to discuss concerns about your sight, please contact our Helpline.

RNIB Helpline

Call, **0303 123 9999**

helpline@rnib.org.uk

Or say, **"Alexa, call RNIB Helpline"**
to an Alexa-enabled device.

Low vision assessments

If your sight can't be improved through new glasses, contact lenses, medical or surgical treatment, then you can ask your GP or your ophthalmologist (also known as a hospital eye doctor) to refer you to a low vision clinic.

It is important that you have an assessment so that you get advice and the equipment that is best for you. There should broadly be three stages to your assessment:

- A discussion about what activities you find difficult and what tasks you need more help with.
- An assessment to find which magnifying devices, lighting and other equipment will help you most and a chance to try them out.
- Some training in using the equipment, and how to look after it.



It's a good idea to think about what you need help with before you attend your assessment. Take letters, a book, labels or items that you find difficult to read; this may help the low vision assessor to provide solutions.

Some low vision aids help you to do activities close up such as reading letters, the headlines in a newspaper, instructions, doing a crossword, or seeing controls on a cooker or sewing machine. Other aids can help you to see things that are far away, such as bus numbers, train departure boards or viewing scenery when outdoors. The assessor will show you how to get the best out of the equipment they prescribe. With a little practice, most people find magnifiers a great help in their daily lives.

Your low vision assessor may advise you to have your glasses prescription checked to ensure you use the correct lenses. Once they have heard the difficulties you have, they will help you choose a suitable magnifier and demonstrate how it should be used.

Low vision assessments usually take place in a low vision clinic based in a hospital, although it could be at your local society for blind and partially sighted people or a local optometrist.

Ask your low vision specialist or your local optometrist about services in your area. Alternatively, you can search online based on where you live:

- In England, use the NHS website at **[nhs.uk/Service-Search](https://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search)**
- In Wales, visit the NHS 111 Wales website at **111.wales.nhs.uk/LocalServices**
In Scotland, use the NHS inform website at **nhsinform.scot/scotlands-service-directory**
- In Northern Ireland, use the Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland website at **[online.hscni.net/other-hsc-organisations/hsc-service-finder](https://www.hscni.net/other-hsc-organisations/hsc-service-finder)**

To find out more about low vision services in your area, ask your GP or contact your local social services department. Our Sightline Directory might also have details of your closest low vision centre, or you can call our Helpline.



How can I make the most of my sight?

Bigger

Making things bigger usually makes them easier to see. By doing this, you can often use more of your vision to help make sense of what you're seeing.

Many people with central vision loss find that this helps a lot, but people with a limited field of vision may not find making things bigger as useful. A low vision assessment will help you work out how useful it will be for you.

Bigger text or items

There is a wide range of easy-to-see products on the market. Clocks and watches with large numbers, big button telephones, large print books and calendars are just some of the items that may help.

Increasing text size can also help. If you're reading text on a phone, tablet or computer, there are usually accessibility options that can increase the size of the text. Alternatively, you can install software, such as ZoomText, that will increase the size and change the contrast on

your screen. Our Confident Living booklet on Technology covers all the basics, and you can order a free copy from our Helpline.

If you receive letters, bills and statements from companies but the text size is too small for you, you can ask them to re-send it in another format like large print. Under the Equality Act you can ask for any letter to be sent in your preferred format – so if you would prefer an audio version of the letter rather than large print, the company you're contacting should be able to provide this.

Magnifiers

Magnifiers may help for daily tasks. People use magnifiers mostly for reading, but you can use them for many activities and tasks around the home, including needlework and DIY as well as some outdoor tasks.

It is best to choose a magnifier with the professional who carries out your low vision assessment. They will assess which magnifier is right for the task you need to do and if you're using it correctly. NHS low vision clinics usually provide a magnifier free of charge. Although you may have to buy additional magnifiers or pay for replacements.

Most magnifiers use a light and lens which increases the size of whatever you're looking at, although there are some that do not have a light. However, there are lots of different types of magnifiers such as handheld, stand, pocket size or video. Many people find that a combination of using a magnifier, good contrast around the house or electronic magnification can help them with the challenge of living with sight loss.

Stronger magnifiers can take practice to use because they are smaller and have quite a reduced focusing distance. It is therefore very important that they are prescribed for you, rather than purchased without professional support. If you don't find the magnifier that works best for you first time, keep persevering as there is almost always a magnifier that will do the job.

Types of magnifiers and their benefits

Handheld magnifiers are easy to use and vary in features and power. They are usually quite small, so are easy to carry around in a bag or your pocket. Some have an in-built light to help brighten what you're looking at. They are great for reading in the home or while you're out and about – handheld magnifiers can be very useful whilst shopping to read prices or a menu in a restaurant.

Stand magnifiers are specially designed with a stand that allows you to place the magnifier on the page and slide across the print as you read it. This means that instead of holding the magnifier away from the page, you can rest it on a table while reading. Some people find this more comfortable for their arms, hands and shoulders.

Chest magnifiers are generally large, low-powered magnifiers with an adjustable cord to hang around your neck while it rests on your chest area or a stand that allows you to hold objects underneath it. They have low magnification but offer a wide viewing area. They are useful for some reading tasks and activities such as sewing, DIY and personal care (for example cutting fingernails). These are mainly useful for people with mild sight loss as they have quite weak power and it's not possible to make them any stronger.

There are also **flat field magnifiers**, also known as bar or dome magnifiers. They are helpful if you have relatively good vision and are useful for reading reference material with columns or lists of information.

Distance magnifiers, including binoculars and telescopes, are also available. For example, you could find a small telescope useful for identifying bus or train information on the bus indicator boards.



Video magnifiers use a camera and screen to make an image easier to see, not just by making it bigger but by also changing the colours and contrast. Some magnifiers have the ability to capture text and save it so you can read at a later date. They are available in desktop and portable versions. They are sometimes called electronic magnifiers instead.

Our Everyday Living Solution Products catalogue contains product information about various magnifiers and lighting options. You can order a copy by calling our Helpline or visit our Online Shop at [rnib.org.uk/shop](https://www.rnib.org.uk/shop). However, you should get advice from a low vision professional before buying a particular product to make sure it meets your needs in the best way.

Brighter

You should make sure that you have as much light as you feel comfortable with for each task that you do. Everyone is different and you will need to find the amount of light that's best for you. Your low vision professional should be able to give you general advice about lighting. A rehabilitation worker from the sensory team at social services should be able to give you specific advice for your home.

Lighting

Good lighting can help you make the most of your sight by increasing contrast and clarity. This should make you feel more independent in your home, as you'll be able to move around safely and easily. It can help you to avoid falls and to continue with or take up new hobbies and interests.

Because of your eye condition, your eyes may need more time to adapt to the different lighting levels within your home. When you go from a bright room to a dark room it can take several minutes for your eyes to adjust. Having consistent, even and controllable lighting levels throughout your home can help reduce the time it takes your eyes to adjust. However some eye conditions cause people to experience uncomfortable glare so it isn't always just a case of increasing the brightness of all the lights in your home.

You can make the most of natural daylight in your home by:

- using window blinds with horizontal or vertical slats to control bright light and glare
- keeping curtains secured or tied back from windows
- not using net curtains as they block light.

“I can see closeup reasonably well, but reading text is difficult for me, I have to use certain lights and I’m also photophobic. I tend to keep my curtains closed when I’m indoors and try not to use fluorescent lighting. When I’m out, I can’t see the signs on things and people’s faces aren’t very clear anymore. I still have some clear vision in my right eye. I can read a book, but only for about a minute or two before my eyes start to hurt.”

Eddie Hartopp

General lighting

General lighting should give an even light to avoid shadows and dark areas. Brightness levels should be similar across rooms to avoid your eyes having to adjust when moving between well-lit and significantly darker areas.

Lighting in your home can be improved relatively simply and quickly, without affecting decorations or furnishings. You can, fit brighter bulbs, change shades and fittings to increase light levels and prevent glare, and add a table, desk or floor light.

Options for general lighting include ceiling lights, multi-arm pendant lights (so multiple bulbs are used), wall lights and spotlights.

Task lighting

With this form of lighting, you can direct light where you need it. It is ideal for detailed activities and close-up tasks such as reading, writing, preparing and eating food, and hobbies such as knitting or sewing. For example, when reading, it may be easier to see text if you use a lamp that can be adjusted so that the page you're reading is illuminated directly. They offer great flexibility as they can be moved easily

to use them where you need them. You can also use portable lights in the kitchen, over the cooker and in wardrobes.

To get the most from task lighting you should place it between you and the task so that the shade is below your eye level to reduce glare. Remember to use general lighting alongside task lighting to help prevent eye strain caused by shadows.

Your choice of task light will depend on what you are doing, the level of light required and where the task is located. Task lights are available in floor standing, portable and desk versions, as well as book lights. They use different bulbs including LED, fluorescent (CFLs) and halogen.

If you would like advice on how to improve the lighting in your home, contact our Helpline.

Glare

Glare is when a light source affects your ability to see clearly or causes a lot of discomfort. Often this is a problem if you aren't able to control lighting, for example when you're outside, in a supermarket or at work.

Many people use UV eye shields or wraparound shades to deal with glare and light sensitivity. They are larger than normal glasses and can stop light from entering above and to the sides – the fit of these is important to stop the light coming in from the edges of the frame.

By reducing the amount of ultra violet light that enters your eyes, eye shields can help to reduce glare and light sensitivity. Tinted lenses can also improve contrast and make your vision more comfortable. You should try on different colours as the tint can vary. It's important to try them on outside so that you can work out the best tint for you.

In addition to UV eye shields and wraparound shades, a hat with a brim can also help shield the light too. Some people find that they need more than one pair for different activities and weather.

Bolder

Using contrasting colours can really help. Contrast is how an object or text stands out from its background because of its colour or tone. Black on white is the strongest contrast, but there are other colour combinations that can also provide the same benefit, these include black on yellow and blue on yellow.

Contrast can be used in different ways – such as, using cups or coloured glasses which contrast with your table or dark coloured chopping boards to help with preparing food. Door frames which contrast with the door or your walls, or a duvet which contrasts with the carpet are also good examples. Some people may find that removing different patterns in a room can help or perhaps even using just one strong pattern instead.

Using a bold felt tip pen to write with will make the text bigger and bolder. A notebook with thick lines will help guide your writing and can help when taking notes too.

An example is the colour contrast of white crockery against a dark blue table mat which helps with visibility.



Technology

Changing the brightness, contrast or screen resolution can all help when using phones, tablets and computers. Many popular smartphones and tablets have in-built accessibility features that you can use to change screen colours or font sizes. You can also choose from a range of free or paid-for accessibility software to make your computer easier to use.

“There’s no way that I’d have been able to continue to do my job effectively without the equipment that I now have access to, especially the ZoomText software and the large screens. I can’t work without font size 16.”

Chris Owen

Our Confident Living series booklet on Technology provides useful advice on how to use technology when you have sight loss. You can read about the accessibility features of computers, phones, video magnifiers, TVs and radios. Call our Helpline or visit the RNIB shop to order your copy.

We can also provide advice and support with technology including in depth help over the phone, assistance in person from one of our volunteers and grants towards some technology items for people receiving a means-tested benefit.



Other products that can help

There are many products that can help you to maintain your independence but you may need to purchase some of these from specialist suppliers. If you would prefer to try out an item before buying it, many local societies have resource centres you can visit.

We sell a wide range of products that can help you to make the most of your sight. Many are for everyday use, both in and outside the home. They include:

- Talking landline phones that announce number and menu selections with large number keypads and large high contrast screens
- Talking and tactile watches, and watches with large numbers and hands.
- A range of home and kitchen products such as the audible/vibratory liquid level indicator. This clips over the top of a mug or cup and will let you know when the liquid reaches the right level. Other items include a safety peeler, heat resistant gloves, and talking kitchen scales.

- A wide range of books, magazines in audio CD or USB, and large or giant print puzzle books. You can also get large print stationery, including address books, diaries and calendars.
- Products to help with note taking and making lists.
- Tactile labelling products **BumperStops** are self-adhesive raised plastic markers that come in different colours in either a circle or square shape. They can be used on any surface and are helpful for identifying where a setting might be on a microwave, or washing machine for example.
- Audio labelling products and voice recorders. The PenFriend can be used to label a wide range of items. You can record short or long messages on each label, making it perfect to label clothes, food or other items in the house.

To see the items we have in our Online Shop, visit [rnib.org.uk/shop](https://www.rnib.org.uk/shop) or call our Helpline and ask for our **Everyday Living Solutions** product catalogue. You can visit the Sightline Directory to find your nearest resource centre.

Glossary

We've used some terms which you might be unfamiliar with if you haven't had a low vision assessment before, so we've put together this glossary which you can quickly refer back to.

Ophthalmologists are specialist eye doctors who diagnose, treat and monitor eye conditions with medication and surgery. They usually work in hospital eye departments or clinics (often called ophthalmology departments).

Optometrists/opticians are qualified to examine your vision, prescribe glasses and detect eye conditions. Optometrists are able to detect eye conditions and refer you to an ophthalmologist for diagnosis and treatment if it is needed. Some optometrists may specialise in low vision and may help you with your low vision aids.

Optical magnifiers are magnifiers which use an optical lens to make things look bigger.

Video magnifiers are magnifiers which use a camera to make items look bigger and change the contrast or colour.

Focusing distance is the distance away from the magnifier that an object has to be for it to be seen clearly.

Magnification level is the number of times bigger a magnifier makes an object or text look. For example, a 4x magnifier is a lens that makes the object look four times bigger.

Optical aids are aids that involve the use of an optical lens such as magnifiers, spectacles or contact lenses.

Non-optical aids are equipment that is designed to help someone make the most of their sight or provide an alternative to using their sight. These are items such as a large print newspaper or a talking clock.

Further information

If you need someone who understands sight loss, call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999**, say "**Alexa, call RNIB Helpline**" to an Alexa-enabled device, or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**.

Our opening hours are weekdays from 8am–8pm and Saturdays from 9am–1pm

Find services and organisations near you that support blind or partially sighted people:
sightlinedirectory.org.uk

Sightline directory

Find services and organisations near you that support blind or partially sighted people:
sightlinedirectory.org.uk

Visionary

To find your local sight loss charities email **visionary@visionary.org.uk** or visit **visionary.org.uk**



RNIB Booklet Series

About the Starting Out series

Essential information about living with sight loss. Titles include:

- Benefits, Concessions and Registration
- Emotional Support
- Help from Social Services
- Making the Most of Your Sight

About the Confident Living Series

Information to build confidence and independence. Titles include:

- Reading
- Shopping
- Technology
- Travel

About the Understanding Series

More about your eye condition. Titles include:

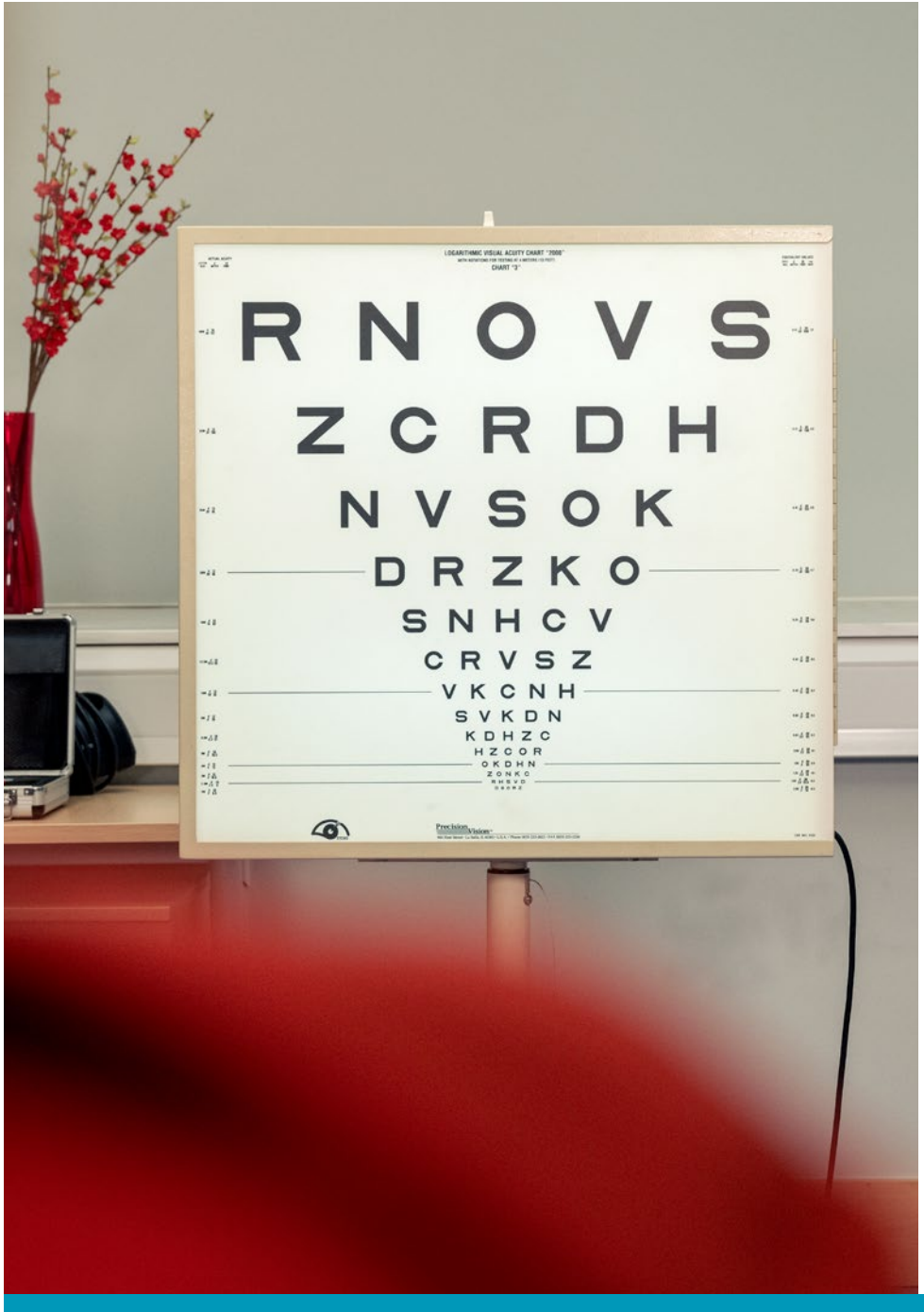
- Age Related Macular Degeneration
- Cataracts
- Visual hallucinations caused by sight loss – Charles Bonnet Syndrome
- Dry Eye
- Eye Conditions Related to Diabetes
- Glaucoma
- Nystagmus
- Retinal Detachment
- Inherited Retinal Dystrophies including Retinitis Pigmentosa
- Posterior Vitreous Detachment

For audio, print or braille versions of these booklets please contact our Helpline or visit **rnib.org.uk/shop**

For a list of information sources used in these titles and to provide feedback on the Starting Out and Confident Living Series, email **ckit@rnib.org.uk**. To provide feedback on the Understanding Series, email **eyehealth@rnib.org.uk**.

Connect with others

Meet or connect with others who are blind or partially sighted online, by phone or in your community to share interests, experiences and support for each other. From book clubs and social groups to sport and volunteering, our friendly, helpful and knowledgeable team can link you up with opportunities to suit you. Visit rnib.org.uk/connect or call **0303 123 9999**.



RNIB Helpline



Call: **0303 123 9999**



Email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**



Or say, **"Alexa, call RNIB Helpline"**
to an Alexa enabled device.

This booklet has been produced jointly by RNIB and The Royal College of Ophthalmologists.

RNIB is a member of the Patient Information Forum (PIF) and have been certified under the PIF TICK quality mark scheme.

Produced date: June 2023

Review date: June 2025

PR12375P

ISBN 978-1-4445-0144-5

Version: 003