

**Visual Impairment Services
Highland**

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How to use better lighting to make things easier to see

Your home should be a place where you can feel at ease. If you have a serious sight problem, everyday things like cooking. Reading a letter or just going upstairs can seem quite daunting.

By making simple changes to the lighting in your home, you may make things easier to see and be more comfortable. This leaflet gives practical tips and advice about changes to lighting you could make at home.

Keeping light levels the same

If you have low vision, it can take a long time for your eyes to adapt when moving from bright to dark places. Try and keep the levels of light the same through your home.

Using more light fittings or higher wattage bulbs increases the light levels. Always remember : do not use higher voltage bulbs without checking that the fittings and shades that you can take them!

Halogen lights

Halogen lights are very bright so people find them useful. However, the bulbs are very expensive, they can use a lot of electricity and they get very hot

Safety tips

Make sure that lamps do not have trailing wires or leads. Use a multiplug that allows you to plug in a number of plugs safely rather than socket adapters that can be dangerous. Make sure that lamps have the correct fuses in their plugs. If in doubt about the safety of a light or plug, call on electrician

Reducing light levels

Sometimes, people prefer less light. Switching the overhead lights off and only using lamps on their own means that the light levels will be uneven. If you want to reduce light levels evenly throughout a room, try and use a dimmer switch that allows you to vary the amount of overhead light.

Many people find light uncomfortable outdoors, or even inside on a bright day. It is often the light that reaches your eyes from above and the sides that cause this discomfort. For this reason, ordinary sunglasses may not solve the problem. A brimmed hat or tennis peak often help, but many people find that tinted spectacles with side shields are the most useful. You can also get clip-ons with side shields and tinted over glasses (overshields) to use with your everyday spectacles. These are particularly useful because you can remove them quickly if you go into a dark area.

Lighting on stairs and landing

Take particular care to keep stairs and landing brightly lit. These areas are often more dimly lit than the rooms leading onto them and this can be dangerous. If possible, make sure that stair lighting can be switched on and off at the top and bottom of the stair. Infra-red sensors can be used to make the light switch on and off automatically, but they are expensive to fit.

Lighting in the kitchen

It is very important to have good light in the kitchen. It is easier to see kitchen work surfaces that are lit directly rather than from a ceiling light. You can fix lights to wall cupboards and shelves so that they shine onto the worktop. Cpl-On spotlights are useful to make specific areas brighter and fluorescent strip lights are better to light a whole work surface. However, bare lamps are a source of glare, which can make things difficult to see. To prevent this, fix a shade on any fluorescent strip lights you fit.

Using fluorescent bulbs

More adjustable lamps are available now that use fluorescent bulbs. These are sometimes called PL fluorescent lamps.

Although these lamps are more expensive to buy, they are cheaper to run

Other benefits of using fluorescent bulbs are:

- They do not get very hot when they are being used
- They last up to eight times longer than ordinary bulbs of the same wattage
- They give off five times the amount of light than ordinary bulbs of the same wattage
- You can buy fluorescent bulbs in day light colours which some people prefer

These bulbs can be made from clear, frosted, white or coloured glass. The brightness of the light depends to some extent on the type of glass the bulb is made from. Try not to use clear bulbs as these can be uncomfortable. Frosted and white bulbs give light with softer shadows they only lose a small amount of light and are more comfortable.

Blue bulbs are more expensive. They give off a particular white light that is called 'daylight'. Some people find this light better.

The disadvantages of using filament bulbs are:

- They get very hot and could burn a person who touches them or is next to one for a long time. They can be uncomfortable to sit near.
- They use more electricity than fluorescent bulbs

Do not use higher wattage bulbs without checking that the fittings and shades can take them

Lighting tips for the daytime

To let as much light as possible into your home, keep your curtains drawn back clear of the windows. If you don't want to have completely bare windows you can put up lightweight net curtains. Keeping your windows clean and painting window frames and walls a light colour, may also help you make the most of daylight. Decorating also makes a difference to daylight.

How to use close-up lighting

As well as having good general lighting in the room, it is important to have a second light source which can shine directly onto what you need to see.

If you are near a window, sit down so that you have your back to the window. This will mean that the light comes over your shoulder and lands on what you want to see. It is often easier to use a lamp that shines onto the activity.

Using lamps and standard lamps

Normal table lamps and standard lamps give some light for close-up jobs. However, the light doesn't shine on what you want to see and is often not very bright. This is because the bulbs usually face upwards, so they lose a lot of light from the top. Also they are not adjustable. The light bulbs in standard lamps are further away which means that less light shines on what you want to see.

If you use a shade on your table or standard lamp which has a white lining inside, more of the light given out by the lamp will be reflected onto what you want to see. Table lampshades direct the most light if they are 10 to 12 inches wide.

Using adjustable lamps

Adjustable lamps are particularly useful because you can point to make the light fall directly onto what you want to see.

The best position for an adjustable lamp is between you and what you want to look at, directed at the task, below eye level.

Make sure the lampshade does not get too hot so that you don't burn yourself when you are adjusting it.

Different types of light bulb for lamps

Using filament bulbs

The most commonly used bulbs are filament light bulbs. These are usually balloon-shaped with wires inside. The brightness of these bulbs depends on the number of watts they have. The higher the number of watts, the brighter the bulb will be.