

# Independent Living Assistance

## Low vision products



A person may be considered to have low vision when their loss of sight cannot be corrected by optical prescription alone.

People with low vision have varied levels of residual vision and performance of everyday tasks may be impeded. New methods of doing activities or the use of low vision products may assist people with a vision impairment to manage activities of daily living and help maintain independence.

### **Magnifiers**

Magnifiers are available in a range of sizes, shapes and strengths to suit a person's needs. However, some require a prescription by an optometrist, orthoptist or an ophthalmologist to select the appropriate strength magnification lens.

Magnifying sheets are held directly above the surface to be magnified and have a low magnification. Handheld magnifiers have a larger range of strengths to suit varying degrees of vision loss and some are illuminated. A magnifier that is supported by a cord around the neck or a magnifier on a supportive stand allows both hands free to do activities like holding and turning the pages of a book, or needlework. Magnifying lamps are either free standing, floor standing or clamped to a table and offer a hands-free option with a built-in light.

### **Household aids**

There are a variety of household aids that feature a computer-generated voice; such as talking calculators or kitchen scales that give the weight of food placed in its bowl. Talking clocks and talking watches tell the time audibly when a button is pressed. Some talking watches also have a vibrating alarm. A talking clock with a thermometer is available that speaks the time and then the room temperature. Alternatively, there are watches with tactile surfaces and

watches and clocks with large numbers. Talking timers usually combine a talking timer function with a talking clock function. The timer may count up or down.

A liquid level finder is a battery powered device that indicates when liquid in a cup has reached a certain level. Once the liquid reaches the sensor, an auditory signal will sound. With a dual liquid level finder, a pulsating intermittent buzzer sounds when the liquid reaches the first level and a continuous buzzer sounds when it reaches the second level.

The vibrating liquid level finder for people with vision and hearing loss vibrates against the side of the cup to indicate the level of the liquid.

### **Bathroom and medication equipment**

Magnifying mirrors are available in a range of magnifications. Two-way mirrors may be swivel mounted with magnification on one side and a regular mirror on the other.

Talking bathroom scales have a digital display and audibly state weight in pounds and kilograms when someone is standing on the scales. A talking blood pressure monitor audibly tells a person's blood pressure and a talking forehead thermometer announces the person's body temperature.

Medication containers are available in a wide range of sizes with larger print and high contrast lettering, identifying the day and time, some also feature Braille. An eye dropper guide is used to assist in the administration of eye drops.

### **Dressing aids and management of glare sensitivity**

There are many different methods to identify clothing. One system is to use identification buttons which are available in eight different shapes. Each shape denotes a specific colour. They are sewn in an inconspicuous place on the clothing to assist with colour coordination when

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dressings. A talking colour detector can be held against a surface and will detect and audibly identify the colour.

Sock tuckers are a plastic device into which socks are threaded so that pairs of socks can be identified.

Controlling glare indoors and out can assist people with a vision impairment to maximise both vision and comfort. Glasses with a wide range of colours, shades, and styles are available with 100% UV protection. They are designed to be worn either over the top of prescription glasses or on their own.

### Writing aids

Heavily lined paper and writing templates can provide a guide when writing. A signature guide is a small, portable template for signing your name and there is an envelope guide to assist with writing addresses on envelopes. Using a felt tipped dark coloured pen for writing also provides good visual contrast on white paper.

### Telephones & technology

A range of big button telephones are available with large numbers on contrasting backgrounds. These include cordless, landline and mobile options. There are multiple apps for both Android and iOS phones to enlarge and contrast writing.

### Recreation/leisure

Playing cards are available in a range of sizes and include large print and Braille options. Free standing or hand held card holders are also available. Games with larger print or with tactile indicators are available and include Ludo, Scrabble, Snakes and Ladders, Chess, Chinese Checkers, Dominoes and Draughts. There are Braille editions of the games Upwords and Uno. It is possible to get a dictionary, thesaurus, diary, calendar, puzzle book, or music book in large print. Audio books are available via online devices. Book stands assist people who have difficulty supporting a book and holding it open.

Specialised craft items are available for example: needle threaders that assist with threading cotton through the eye of the needle and backlit magnifiers for sewing and reading.

Remote controls are available in a range of sizes with bigger buttons for operating televisions and audiovisual devices. A television screen magnifier can be attached to the front of the television to enlarge the image. Magnifying glasses especially designed for watching television help some; however, some people with low vision may simply benefit from sitting closer to the television.

### Money identification

The Reserve Bank has developed a credit-card sized device that uses the different lengths of Australia's banknotes to help people who are blind or have low vision distinguish between denominations. This Banknote Measure device is available from Blind Citizens Australia and the Reserve Bank free of charge (all production costs being met by the Reserve Bank). The toll free number for Blind Citizens Australia is 1800 033 660.

<https://banknotes.rba.gov.au/resources/for-people-with-vision-impairment/banknotes-measure-device/>

Coin holders can be used to identify and store \$1 and \$2 coins.

### Contrasting colours

Contrasting colours define objects and make them stand out from the background. A dark coloured placemat under a white dinner plate will help define the edge of the plate and accentuate the food. A white cup may assist in determining the level of dark tea or coffee. Use a dark coloured chopping board for preparing lighter coloured vegetables. A contrasting colour along the edge of a workbench will help define it. A strip of paint on a step will clearly define the edge.

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#### Tactile marking

Tactile markers can be used on a variety of household appliances to locate controls. They can be used to locate light switches, power points, temperature controls on a stove, buttons and controls on tape recorders and remote controls. A variety of materials are available to provide a tactile mark. These include plastic raised dots, paint dots with raised profile and hook and loop Velcro fastenings.

#### Identification badges

Badges that indicate that a person has a vision impairment may be of benefit to raise awareness in various settings such as banks, shops, and public transport.

#### Technological solutions

Screen magnification software magnifies screen text and graphics. Screen review software sends the text displayed on a computer screen to a speech synthesiser. Text to speech scanners reproduce printed text as spoken words. Electronic magnifiers enlarge printed text and images onto a screen or monitor.

#### Further information and support

##### Royal Society for the Blind

The Royal Society for the Blind (RSB, aka See Differently) is a not-for-profit organisation providing services for South Australians who have a vision impairment.

Its aim is to assist people to maintain their independence and participate in the community.

The RSB Low Vision Centre has a large range of daily living aids that are available for purchase without an appointment. Some magnifiers can be purchased over the counter; however, higher strength magnifiers may need to be prescribed by an optometrist through the Low Vision Centre's clinic.

The RSB Adaptive Technology Centre displays and demonstrates adaptive technology including computers with adaptive software

(magnification and speech), Braille equipment and electronic magnification (desktop and portable).

For more information telephone 1300 944 306, check the RSB website [www.seedifferently.org.au](http://www.seedifferently.org.au) or visit the Low Vision Centre, 212 Pirie Street, Adelaide SA 5000.

#### Guide Dogs SA/NT

The Guide Dogs SA/NT Low Vision Service provides assessment, practical help and advice about of daily living aids and assistive technology for people with low vision an appointments including individualised training programs.

For further information to request a service telephone 1800 757 738 or visit the website: <https://sant.guidedogs.com.au>

Through **My Aged Care** it is possible for older people with vision impairment to access Australian Government-subsidised support services and assistive technology. To check eligibility and apply for an assessment, call 1800 200 422 or visit [www.myagedcare.gov.au/](http://www.myagedcare.gov.au/).

Catalyst Foundation (including Seniors Information Service) can help with sourcing useful resources and locating equipment suppliers. Tel. (08) 8168 8776 or email [information@catalystfoundation.com.au](mailto:information@catalystfoundation.com.au).

*The information contained here is general in nature and is not intended as health advice.*

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