

Home Modifications for Persons with Vision Impairments

The basic principles to keep in mind when considering home modifications for persons with vision impairments are reducing clutter, improving lighting, and utilizing color and contrast. These principles can help individuals to safely maintain a level of independence while also making objects more visible.

Steps and stairways

- Mark the leading edge of the first and last steps with bright paint or light-reflecting tape that contrasts with the background color of the flooring.
- Cover the landing areas at the top and bottom of the stairs with carpeting that provides contrast with the texture of the stair treads.
- Paint staircase handrails in a bright color that contrasts with the walls and flooring.
- Place a tactual mark, such as a piece of masking tape or a rubber band, on the handrail at the top and bottom of the staircase to give advance warning of steps or stairs.
- Use solid, brightly colored, and/or textured hallway runners to clearly define walking spaces.

Lighting, glare, and windows

- Try to maintain continuous lighting levels throughout the home. If possible, install supplementary lighting in entryways, hallways, and at the top and bottom of each staircase to eliminate shadows or excessively bright areas.
- Install fluorescent ceiling fixtures for general room lighting, supplemented with incandescent, LED, or halogen lighting in desk lamps, table lamps, and floor fixtures.
- Use flexible-arm lamps for close work, such as reading, meal preparation, and writing.
- Use nightlights to create a lighted pathway for movement from one room to another at night.
- Install dimmer switches on incandescent lamps and ceiling fixtures to control illumination levels and glare.
- Use mini-blinds or vertical shades to control direct sunlight.
- Use lamp shades that are light-colored and translucent; generally, this type of shade allows the maximum transmission of light without glare.

Kitchen and dining areas

- Use white plates on a dark tablecloth, or place dark dishes on a white or light-colored cloth. If possible, avoid using clear glass cups and dishes.
- Use brightly colored fluorescent tape to increase the visibility of drawer pulls and the edges of cabinet doors.
- Paint cupboard or cabinet doors in a solid bright color to make them stand out against the walls and counters. Replace cabinet hardware with brightly colored contrasting handles.
- Use brightly colored raised marking dots on the stove, oven, and microwave controls to allow for easier adjustments.
- Wrap brightly colored contrasting electrical tape around pot handles to make them more visible.

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- Reduce glare by using a non-glare floor wax, using non-glossy placemats and tablecloths, and placing rugs (with the edges secured) over glare spots on high gloss floors.
- Use a reversible black and white cutting board to provide contrast. For example, onions, potatoes, and yellow squash will show up more clearly on the black side, while the white side will provide greater contrast with tomatoes and green vegetables.

In the bathroom

- When towels, washcloths, and bath mats need replacing, purchase solid colors that contrast with the tub, floor, and wall tile.
- Float a brightly colored sponge in the bathtub to help determine the water level and avoid overflow.
- Transfer soap, shampoo, and other bath products to brightly colored plastic bottles or wall-mounted containers that contrast with the tub and wall tile.
- Use soap-on-a-rope or a wash mitt with a soap pocket to help locate soap more easily and prevent dropping and slipping on it in the tub or shower.
- Drape a contrasting bath mat over the edge of the tub or apply a strip of contrasting colored tape along the entire edge of the tub to make it easier to see.
- Replace a white toilet seat with a brightly colored one that contrasts with the walls and fixtures.

Bedrooms and closets

- Use a bedside lamp with a “clap-on” feature, or one that can activate by simply touching the base.
- Install flexible-arm lamps wherever needed for reading or identifying clothing and medication.
- In closets, install battery-operated lights that can be mounted on the wall.
- Attach a bed caddy to the side of the bed to hold eyeglasses, medication, and tissues.
- Anchor all lamps in place to avoid knocking or pulling them over.

In the living room

- Is the lighting too dim, too bright, or does it cover too small an area? If so, consider increasing the wattage of light bulbs (within recommended limits), repositioning lamps, or adding additional lighting.
- Add dimmer switches to lamps so that light intensity can change as needed.
- Try rearranging the furniture so that a reading chair is positioned to take advantage of natural sunlight.
- Reposition the television to reduce glare on the screen.

Keep the following color and contrast principles in mind when evaluating a home:

- Solid, bright colors such as red, orange, and yellow are generally the easiest to see because of their ability to reflect light.
- Distinguishing colors within each of the following groups may be more difficult for some individuals who have low vision:
 - Navy blue, brown, and black
 - Blue, green, and purple
 - Pink, yellow, and pale green
- Place light-colored objects against darker backgrounds. A white sheet of paper is more visible against a brown desktop or dark blotter.
- Place dark objects against lighter backgrounds. A dark chair will stand out better against white or cream-colored walls.

www.visionaware.org

American Federation for the Blind <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=40&TopicID=217>