

VISUAL IMPAIRMENT

What is visual impairment, is it blindness?

Whilst, there are visually impaired people, less than 1 in 10 are totally blind. Being visually impaired means that even with glasses, you cannot see what you need to see.

How many visually impaired people are there?

The best information suggests that there are over 1.5 million people in the UK who have significant impairment of vision.

What is the best source of information?

The BBC produces a handbook for its long running Radio 4 programme, 'In Touch', which covers all aspects of getting help if you have a vision problem (see address below).

If glasses can't help, why ask an optometrist or optician?

Because we are able to advise on the best use of the vision you have or, if they are not an expert in the field, they can refer you on to someone who is.

What is a low vision aid or LVA?

This is any optical device that can be used to make better use of remaining vision. It may be no more than a simple magnifier, or it may look like a pair of opera glasses or even a TV set.

Will it hurt my eyes to make more use of them with LVA?

Absolutely not. All eye experts agree that you can do no further harm and trying to use your eyes will keep you in practice. If you get a headache on some occasions, simply rest.

Can I buy one in a shop?

Some magnifiers can be bought this way. They tend to be the weaker ones. An LVA should really be prescribed by a practitioner after a full eye examination.

What can you do with a LVA?

In general, they make things bigger so that you can read print that is otherwise too small, or a street sign that is too far away. As the magnification increases, the useful field of vision becomes smaller.

Will I be able to read a newspaper again?

It may be possible if remaining vision is good enough, your motivation is good and you are prepared to try and use your vision differently.

What else can an LVA help with?

Mostly, LVAs enable you to regain a little independence as you may be able to read price tickets, count money or keep up with correspondence yourself.

Do I need more than one LVA?

Most often there isn't one LVA that will do everything, you may need more.

How do I know if my vision is good enough to benefit from a LVA?

If you can read the biggest headlines in the paper, you probably have enough vision to work with.

How can I help my practitioner when I ask for a LVA?

Take along examples of the print you need to read and think carefully about the different sizes of print you need to see in everyday life. Have a good idea of what sort of lighting you have at home and be clear about particular difficulties.

Are LVAs expensive?

They are complicated lenses and this makes them more expensive than a standard magnifying glass.

Can I get one on the NHS?

Everyone is entitled to have a LVA provided by the NHS. They are loaned to you permanently. You need to attend a hospital LVA clinic. Ask us to refer you.

What about training?

You may need special instruction in the use of the LVA. Ask us.

Is lighting important?

Good lighting is often the best help of all. It is essential to have a light that can be moved close to what you need to see. A light up in the ceiling is no good, whatever the wattage. Good daylight is the best, but you need your back to the window.

What about TV?

Sit as close as you like.

Is an LVA the only answer?

A LVA is only one part of the process of vision rehabilitation. You may need to get help with other things from other professionals, e.g. a social worker or mobility officer.

Should I be registered Blind or Partially Sighted?

If you are not registered, the authorities will not know you have special needs as far as vision is concerned. Registration sounds worse than it is and there are benefits, practical and financial. Consult the "In Touch" handbook.

Contacts

RNIB Tel: 020 7388 1266, Partially Sighted Society Tel: 020 7372 1551

Books and Information

'In-Touch Handbook' – Broadcasting Support Services, PO Box 7, London W3 6XJ

'Lighting and low Vision' – Electricity Council, 30 Millbank, London SW1P 4RD