



# **Adapting to Low Vision**

**A beginning guide  
for lifestyle adaptation  
to low vision.**



**∴ Wisconsin Council of the  
Blind & Visually Impaired**

# Adapting to Low Vision

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This booklet is a beginning guide for lifestyle adaptation to low vision. Low vision occurs when visual changes cannot be corrected with eyeglasses, medication, or surgery. Low vision may be the result of eye diseases, such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. It can also occur with brain injuries and neurological conditions, such as stroke and multiple sclerosis. Persons with low vision have residual vision that can be used with other senses, hearing and touch, and vision rehabilitation strategies to create safe, healthy and comfortable engagement in daily activities.

This booklet is only the beginning. Try some of the strategies on your own. Consider consulting with vision rehabilitation professionals who can assist in implementing the ideas presented here as well as teaching new strategies to manage everyday tasks. Vision rehabilitation professionals have knowledge in low vision, assistive technology, orientation and mobility, and in-home adaptive living skills.



**∴ Wisconsin Council of the  
Blind & Visually Impaired**

754 Williamson Street  
Madison, WI 53703-3546

608-255-1166  
Toll Free 800-783-5213  
Sharper Vision Store 608-237-8100

[info@wcblind.org](mailto:info@wcblind.org)

[wcblind.org](http://wcblind.org)

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## Veterans Affairs (VA) Resources Hospital Contacts:

### **William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital**

2500 Overlook Terrace, Madison, WI

Eligibility Office: 608-280-7038

If you are legally blind, contact Kurt Brunner,  
608-256-1901 ext 11960.

### **Milwaukee VA Medical Center**

5000 W. National Ave., Milwaukee, WI

Eligibility Office: 1-877-222-8387

If you are legally blind, contact Leon Haith,  
414-384-2000 ext 41832.

### **Tomah VA Medical Center**

500 E. Veterans Street, Tomah, WI

Eligibility Office: 1-800-872-8662 x61751

If you are legally blind, contact Kari Arch, 608-372-3971 ext 61831.

**Resources outside of the VA:** (services vary by organization;  
please contact the agency for specific services available)

### **Office for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Wisconsin Department of Health Services

Vision Rehabilitation Specialist in each Wisconsin county.

888-879-0017      [dhs.wisconsin.gov/blind](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/blind)

### **Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired**

754 Williamson Street, Madison, WI 53703

800-783-5213      [wcblind.org](http://wcblind.org)

### **Vision Forward Association**

912 N Hawley Road, Milwaukee, WI 53213

855-878-6056      [vision-forward.org](http://vision-forward.org)

### **Center for Sight and Hearing**

8038 MacIntosh Lane, Rockford, Illinois 61107

815-332-6800      [cshni.org](http://cshni.org)

### **Lighthouse Center for Vision Loss (Duluth Lighthouse for the Blind)**

4505 West Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55807

800-422-0833      [lcfvl.org](http://lcfvl.org)

## **Veterans Transportation Service**

The Veterans Transportation Service (VTS) is designed to ensure that all qualifying veterans have access to care through convenient, safe, and reliable transportation. VTS provides qualifying veterans with free transportation services to/from participating VA medical centers (VAMC) in a multi-passenger van. Contact your local VA for information.

## **Disabled American Veterans**

DAV operates a fleet of vehicles to provide free transportation to VA medical facilities.

### Wisconsin Hospital Service Coordinators

- Madison VA Medical Center 608-280-7019
- Twin Ports VA Clinic 715-398-2406
- Tomah VA Medical Center 608-372-3971 ext 66227
- Milwaukee VAMC 414-384-2000 ext 44384
- Appleton Clinic 920-831-7905
- Green Bay Clinic 920-431-2641

## **Mobility Managers**

[wi-mm.org/web\\_documents/MMDirectory.html](http://wi-mm.org/web_documents/MMDirectory.html)

If you need to get from where you are to anywhere else, a mobility manager can help you find the most efficient, cost effective or creative way of making the trip.

## **Wisconsin Get-Around Guide**

[wisconsin.gov/Documents/travel/pub-transit/get-around.pdf](http://wisconsin.gov/Documents/travel/pub-transit/get-around.pdf)

Intercity and public transportation information from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

## **Aging and Disability Resource Centers**

[dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/consumer/index.htm](http://dhs.wisconsin.gov/adrc/consumer/index.htm)

Counties throughout Wisconsin have an Aging and Disability Resource Center. The ADRC knows the transportation options available in their area. Transportation services are provided for elderly people and people with disabilities. Possible means of transportation may include bus, taxi, and volunteer drivers.

**Consider** consulting with a low vision optometrist or low vision clinic for advice on the strength of glasses or magnifier needed, options available, proper use and posture concerns, and where to find the reading aids you may need.

## Talking Books

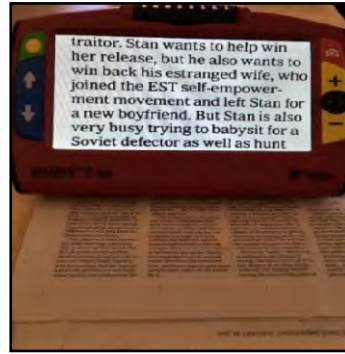
- The Library of Congress offers free talking books to anyone who has difficulty reading print, because of vision or physical impairment.
- A special player is provided at no charge. Books on digital cartridge come in the mail, and a postage paid postcard is provided to return the books.
- An app is available for smartphones and most tablet readers.
- An application can be found at [dpi.wi.gov/talkingbooks/apply](http://dpi.wi.gov/talkingbooks/apply).
- Your local library has books on CD or digital books you can check out. Speak to the librarian to find out what is available.

## What do you want to read?

- **Short reading tasks**, such as the mail, a menu, or a food label, can be accomplished using a hand held magnifier.



- For **longer reading tasks**, such as a book or newspaper article, a stand magnifier or electronic device can help keep print in focus and well lit.



## Lighting

- A flexible arm lamp or gooseneck lamp will help direct light close to the page and out of your eyes.
- Experiment with different types of lightbulbs – try a Daylight bulb, Reveal, Cool White, or Soft White to find the style that provides good contrast and brightness without being too harsh.



Soft White

Cool White

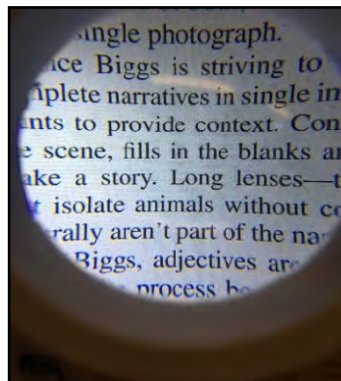
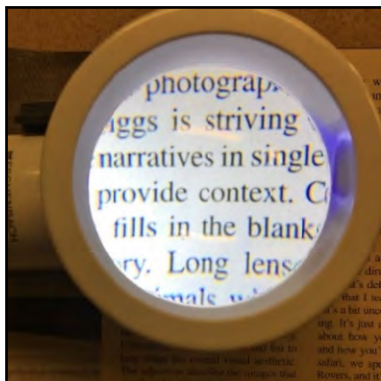
Daylight

[shawnwhisenant.com/light-bulb-colors\\_S/44814/easylovely-light-bulb-colors-f51-on-simple-collection-with-light-bulb-colors/](http://shawnwhisenant.com/light-bulb-colors_S/44814/easylovely-light-bulb-colors-f51-on-simple-collection-with-light-bulb-colors/)



## Positioning

- As magnifiers become stronger, you must move your eye closer to the lens to get the best field of view. Notice how much more text is seen when you move closer to the lens.



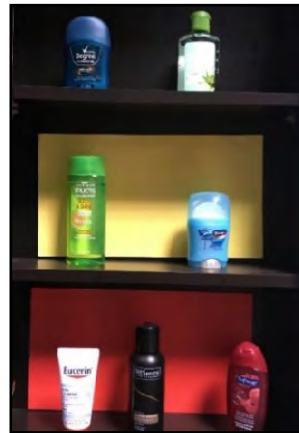
- Find a way to prop up the reading material to reduce back and neck strain. A lap desk or reading stand are recommended.



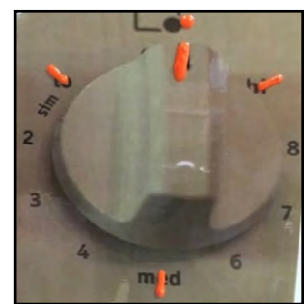
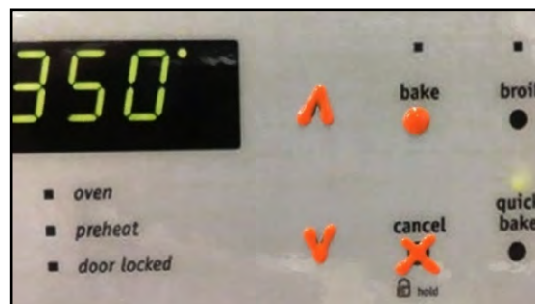


# Ways to Enhance Vision

Use a **contrasting color** in the background to find items in a cabinet or on a counter. In the center photo below, notice how the items on the top shelf seem to fade into the dark background, while the items on the lower shelves stand out.



**Simple, high-contrast, 3-D marks** you can feel can be put on appliance dials. Keep it simple and only mark the dials that are the most important, like the "Start" button on a microwave or the temperature dial on a washing machine. Don't mark every button because that will make it more confusing! You can use fabric paint, self-adhesive dots, Velcro with a sticky back, or tape in high contrast colors to mark dials and controls.



# Ways to Enhance Vision

Use **contrast** to help see medicine bottles. Pay attention to the background and keep it simple to help your eyes focus on the bottle.



Try to **avoid** busy patterns on placemats, tablecloths or plates.



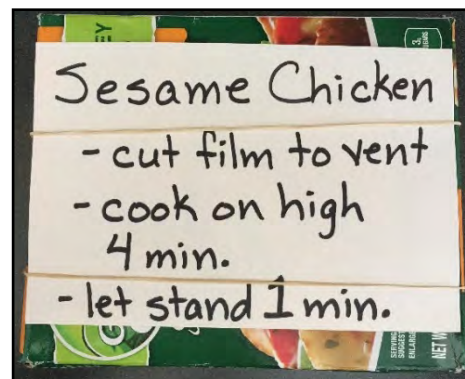
Use a **plain contrasting color** to reduce visual clutter.



**Better solution** – use contrasting, solid colors to enhance vision.

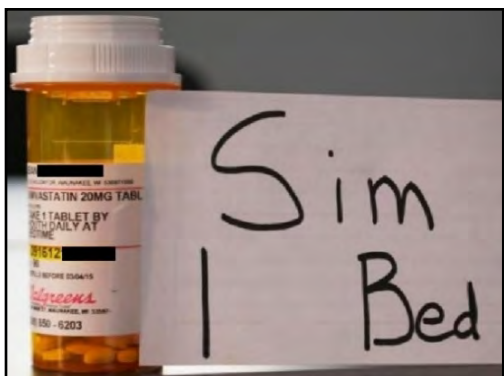
**Create large print labels** for canned, boxed, or frozen food. The big, bold labels you create can be used over and over. Remove the label when the box, bag or can is empty. The labels then become part of a grocery list.

With a bold, permanent marker, print clearly on a 3x5-inch card. Attach the cards with rubber bands. If the card will be used in the freezer or refrigerator, laminate the card at an office supply store before use. Write heating directions for food you cook often on large index cards.



**Know your medications.** Your physician and maybe the pharmacist is aware of your vision loss. Tell them the adaptations you need to access information. If you need large print, audio, or braille, make that known. Work with someone who can guide you as you learn about your medications – their names, dosage, purpose, and precautions. Learn to recognize your medications by size, shape, color, odor or packaging.

Touch, color, and audio labels can be added to prescription bottles to aid recognition. Here are a few ideas for labeling.



An index card with large, bold print information wrapped around a prescription bottle.



Place rubber bands of different colors around the bottles. Remember which color goes with which medication.



With a bold pen, put the first and/or second letters of the medication name on the bottle cap.

Be careful to not cover the original prescription label that would prevent someone from reading it.

Attach an audio label with a device such as PenFriend. Information is recorded onto a self-adhesive voice label. When the tip of the PenFriend touches the label, the audio recording is heard.





Use a pharmacy that offers ScripTalk labels or similar products. With ScripTalk, an audio label is placed in the bottle by the pharmacy. When the prescription bottle is placed on the ScripTalk Reader, that you have at home, an audio message is played.



**Let others know.** Create a reference card listing medications, allergies, recent surgeries, and emergency medical contact. Include all medications (prescriptions, over-the-counter medications, vitamins and supplements) and dosages. Take the card to all health-related appointments. Share the card with a family member. Make the card available to emergency personnel by putting it in an envelope and taping it to the refrigerator. Update the card every 6 months or as your medications change.

**Establish a medication routine that works for you.** A pillbox organizes medications and reminds you of when to take them. Find a box whose compartments are easy to open, labels can be seen, and size fits your fingers when scooping out the pills.

Fill the box the same day every week and at the time of day when you are focused and alert. Check if refills will be needed before the next week and order them.

If you are not comfortable filling your own pill box, ask a family member to help. Check with your pharmacy, as some will prepare weekly or monthly boxes.

There are services that pre-package medications into sorted and organized single serving, multi-dose packets. The packets may come as a strip of soft plastic bags or in hard plastic blister pack bubbles.

Get a watch, clock, or smart phone app on which you can set multiple alarms that remind you when to take medications throughout the day.



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**Evaluate the environment.** Eliminate or reduce any lights that may be reflecting on the television screen. Try closing drapes or turning off/dimming lights. Move your chair closer to the television or sit in a chair that is next to the screen. It won't hurt your eyes to sit closer.

**Consider a television with a bigger screen.** Measure your current screen and the distance between the screen and your television-viewing chair. When at the store, stand the same distance away from the screen as your chair at home. Try out different screen sizes as well as the brightness and sharpness settings.

**Consider a smaller screen.** If you have a narrow field of vision, a smaller screen or accessing television on a tablet or smart phone may be preferable over a big screen.

**Optical aids to magnify the screen.** A magnifying screen placed in front of a television may make the images easier to see; you have to sit directly in front of these magnifiers to reduce distortion. A telescopic aid may make the screen easier to see. Distance-viewing aids, such as binoculars and monoculars, may be helpful.

**Turn on audio description.** Audio description is a narrated voice that describes action and scenes important to the story that you may not see. The narration does not interrupt the dialog. Turn audio description on using the television's remote control menu. Not all programs have audio description, but many do.

**Set up a favorites list.** Using your remote control, put frequently watched stations in a favorites list. Move through the list using up/down channel buttons. This reduces the need to use the keypad.

**Use an audio guide.** An audio guide speaks the program title, time and channel. If using cable, satellite or dish, check with your provider to learn how to access their audio guide. Television controllers that use Roku, Apple TV, and Amazon Fire TV have audio guides.

**Watching sports.** When watching sports on television, mute the television sound and turn on a radio to hear the play-by-play audio. Radio announcers give more information about the game compared to television announcers.



## **TEE Tournament/ National Veterans**

[va.gov/opa/speceven/tee](http://va.gov/opa/speceven/tee)

Provides eligible veterans with an opportunity to participate in adaptive sporting activities such as golf and golf instruction, kayaking, pontoon fishing, horseback riding, horseshoes, disc golf, and adaptive biking. Held in Iowa City area the second week in September.

## **National Veterans Sports Programs & Special Events**

[va.gov/adaptivesports](http://va.gov/adaptivesports)

These specialized rehabilitation programs aim to optimize independence, community engagement, well-being, and quality of life for veterans who have disabilities.

## **Camp American Legion**

[campamericanlegion.org](http://campamericanlegion.org)

Camp American Legion is a place for Wisconsin veterans, military and their families to come together in a safe place. Vision and hearing loss veterans week is in August.

## **Visually Impaired Patriots Experiencing the Road (VIPER)**

[theviperride.org](http://theviperride.org)

Engaging blind, visually impaired and physically disabled veterans to provide a day of motorcycling, socializing, and entertainment.

## **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources – Open the Outdoors**

[dnr.wi.gov/topic/openoutdoors](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/openoutdoors)

Open the Outdoors is your resource for all of the available recreation options for individuals with disabilities.

## **Fishing Has No Boundaries**

[fhnbinc.org](http://fhnbinc.org)

Fishing Has No Boundaries provides recreational fishing opportunities for all anglers with disabilities regardless of their age, race, gender, or disability.

## **Blindfold Games and Game Accessibility**

[blindfoldgames.org](http://blindfoldgames.org) and [game-accessibility.com](http://game-accessibility.com)

Blindfold Games has audio games for the visually impaired community. Game Accessibility is a source for accessible games.



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Blind & Visually Impaired**



This booklet has been made possible thanks to a generous grant to the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired from the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs.

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**The mission of the Council** is to promote the dignity and empowerment of the people in Wisconsin who are blind or visually impaired by providing services, advocating legislation, and educating the general public.

To learn more about the Wisconsin Council of the Blind & Visually Impaired, visit [wcblind.org](http://wcblind.org).

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**The Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs** provides grants and a variety of services to eligible Wisconsin veterans and their families. Programs included in the department's mission are the: Wisconsin Veterans Homes, Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemeteries, Veterans Administration Regional Claims Office, Military Funeral Honors Program, Veterans Assistance Program and the Wisconsin Veterans Museum. These programs are designed to provide health, educational assistance, economic assistance and other services to specified veterans of the armed forces of the United States.

To learn more about the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, visit [dva.wi.gov](http://dva.wi.gov).