

West of England Eye Unit Low Vision Service

Low Vision Aids

The WEEU Optometry Department at the Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital run specialised Low Vision Clinics. You have been referred as your clinician believes that some form of magnification may help your sight.

Why can't I have stronger glasses?

Unfortunately, on this occasion, new glasses will not be of much benefit to your level of sight. This is because what is stopping you seeing as well as you may have in the past is within the eye itself.

Think of your eye as a camera – you can use different lenses (i.e. Glasses) in front of the camera to get the clearest image on the film for different distances. However, if the camera's film is damaged (i.e. Retina), then no matter what lenses you use the image will not be fully focussed.

This is why a magnifier is needed. A magnifier will enlarge the image to help see around the damage. If the strength of magnification needed was put into glasses then they would be very thick and heavy. The text would also have to be held incredibly close – which then blocks out light!

Can I have a magnifier that will cover the whole page?

There are magnifiers, called Fresnel sheets, which are the size of an A4 sheet of paper. However, they can only be a very low strength and give a poor image quality. They also need to be lifted from the page to achieve any magnification.

Low vision aids

Low vision aids are available to you on loan and the cost is met by the hospital. We want you to keep the aid as long as you find it helps. We would like you to return the aid if it is not being used or if it is broken.

You cannot harm your eyes by using a low vision aid.

Types of Aids

- **Hand magnifiers:** Held with one hand above text
- **Stand magnifiers:** Held with one hand onto text
- **Telescopes:** Distance and near. Hand held or worn as glasses

There will always be a compromise between:

- Field of vision (viewing area)
- Magnification
- Working distance

Often if two of these factors are optimised it will lead to a poor third feature. Sometimes therefore more than one aid is required.

Find the correct focus

Hand magnifiers

Hold the magnifier near to the page then draw it away until the text becomes blurry, then move it back toward the page a little, this is the optimal distance. Wearing your distance glasses if you need them can sometimes enhance the image.

Stand magnifiers

Place the magnifier flat onto the page and move across to read lines. Wearing your near glasses if you need them can sometimes enhance the image.

Telescopes

Adjust the focussing barrel on the telescope to focus at different distances.

Helpful Tips

- Try to practice using your magnifier for 10 minutes each day initially.
- Reading tasks can be made easier if the object is held rigid. A newspaper should be folded to expose only one column, or a clipboard/reading stand could be used.
- Keep the magnifier clean using warm water with a small amount of washing up liquid. Use a soft cloth to remove stubborn marks, and then leave it to dry naturally.
- Most lenses are made from plastic which can easily scratch. Try to keep your magnifier in a case or soft pouch. A sock can be useful.
- As a magnifier gets stronger, so the lens gets smaller. To see as many words and letters as possible, you have to place your eye closer to the lens, still keeping the magnifier the correct distance from the page.
- Always remember to use good lighting with your magnifier.

What shall I do if my aid stops working?

If there is a problem with the magnifier itself (e.g. lens breaks/bulb not working) you need to post your aid back to us to get it repaired.

If you have an aid with a light which no longer comes on, change the batteries first before sending it back to us.

However, if the aid has been working well for you and there appears to be no damage to the aid, this could mean there has been a change to the health of your eyes. You should ask your community optometrist for an eye examination and they can refer you back to the hospital if appropriate.

What if I lose my aid?

If an aid is lost then you need to phone the Optometry department on **01392 406037** and a replacement can be sent to you. A record is kept of all aids loaned and replaced. Aids that are repeatedly broken/lost may be subject to further investigation.

Can I have a spare aid?

We cannot issue two of the same aids but we can direct you to an appropriate setting where you can purchase an additional one privately.

Contact Us

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The Trust cannot accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the information given if the leaflet is not used by RD&E staff undertaking procedures at the RD&E hospitals.

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