

Vision loss - safety around the home

Simple tasks around the home, like making a cup of coffee or negotiating stairs, can be hazardous if your vision is deteriorating. However, there are many ways to improve general safety.

General safety tips

Suggestions include:

- Experiment with general and local lighting to see which combination works best for you.
- Remove rugs, since they can curl or slip.
- Get rid of any unwanted items to reduce clutter.
- If possible, don't have patterned carpets.
- Fix extension leads along skirting boards.
- Use a telephone with large numbers.
- Keep emergency numbers in large print next to the telephone, or store them alphabetically in the telephone's memory buttons.
- Make it a habit to keep internal doors completely open or completely shut.

Bathroom

Suggestions include:

- If your bathroom walls are light-coloured, choose dark-coloured towels for contrast.
- Install grab rails in the bath and shower.
- Use a chain to attach the bathplug to the tap.
- Use soap-on-a-rope, or tie soap inside a stocking and hang the stocking from the grab rail.
- Lay non-slip mats inside the bath and shower.
- Electric shavers are safer and easier to use than razors.
- Nail clippers and nail files are safer and easier to use than scissors.

Garden

Suggestions include:

- Cut any low-hanging tree branches.
- Line pathways with contrasting colour strips.
- Orient yourself by using reference markers such as trees and ornaments.
- Pad the tops of garden stakes.
- Install irrigation systems to avoid the need to water the garden by hand.
- Always coil the garden hose after use.

Kitchen

Suggestions include:

- Use kitchen cutters rather than knives to open packets.
- Twist open stubborn jar lids wearing rubber gloves, or use a handheld jar opener, rather than trying to loosen the lid under hot running water.
- Wash knives with a long-handled brush.
- Use aids to cut foods, such as cheese slicers, egg slicers and tomato slicers.
- Put saucepans on the stove before turning on the burners.
- Make it a habit to turn saucepan handles away from you, to prevent accidental knocks.
- Use fire retardant oven mitts and keep a fire prevention blanket in the kitchen.

Laundry

Suggestions include:

- Keep the clothesline above head-height and pad the corners.
- To reduce the risk of burns when ironing, use cotton gloves and always locate the iron by feeling along the electrical cord.

Medications

Suggestions include:

- Distinguish between different medications with large print labels or use tactile markings or brightly coloured tags.
- Use a pill holder with separate compartments for the different days of the week and ask your chemist to fill it for you.
- Mark common dosage levels on medicine cups.
- Pills in blister packs are easier to dispense than pills stored loosely inside a bottle.

Steps and stairs

Suggestions include:

- Affix contrasting colour strips to the edges of all steps and stairs.
- Make sure the colour strips are non-slip.
- Install railings.

Tea, coffee and other hot drinks

Suggestions include:

- Don't use fingers to feel for the level of boiling water inside a cup. The right amount of boiling water in a cup can be indicated by an electronic device called a 'liquid-level indicator' that beeps when the water level reaches the prongs.
- Fill the teapot with cold water, then pour this pre-measured amount into the kettle to boil.
- Heat a cup of cold water in the microwave and add coffee or tea afterwards.
- For contrast, use dark-coloured cups for light liquids and light-coloured cups for dark liquids.
- Put a funnel inside the cup when pouring water to better direct the flow.

Professional advice

Organisations such as Vision Australia can offer valuable advice and information on adapting the home to make it safer for a person who is blind or has low vision. An occupational therapist can also assist. Pamphlets with further information are also available from Vision Australia's ADAPT Centres in Kooyong and Brighton, Victoria.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your vision specialist
- Vision loss organisations
- Occupational therapist
- Vision Australia , and Low Vision Services Tel. 1300 84 74 66

Things to remember

- Simple tasks around the home can be hazardous if your vision is deteriorating.
- Ways to improve safety include using contrast and better lighting, mechanical aids, and large print or tactile labels.
- Seek advice from organisations such as Vision Australia.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

Vision Australia

This Better Health Channel fact sheet has passed through a rigorous approval process. The information provided was accurate at the time of publication and is not intended to take the place of medical advice. Please seek advice from a qualified health care professional.

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