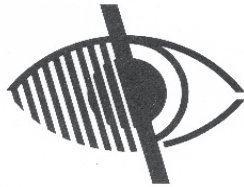


The Partially Sighted Society



Information Sheet

More About Lighting

Even when causes of visual impairment are similar, the particular difficulties which people with limited vision experience and their response to light and other environmental features may be quite different.

It is therefore important to be flexible and take a trial and error approach when seeking a solution for the individual. It is also important that medical advice be sought if there is any reason to be concerned about an eye condition, or if there are any unexpected changes in the amount that can be seen.

The basic requirement is to get enough, but not too much light where it is needed, without glare and with a correct distribution of light from area to area.

Flexibility is needed, not only because people's requirements differ but also because visual tasks themselves vary. Visual tasks differ in a number of crucial ways, but are generally of two types: close or detailed work (e.g. reading, sewing), and seeing at a distance (e.g. moving about). Good lighting takes account of these differences by providing both local lighting for close work and more widespread lighting for background and general-purpose illumination.

In the house, local light is usually provided by table and standard lamps; general lighting by ceiling pendants and/or wall lamps. It is important not to try to light detailed tasks by a ceiling mounted lighting fitting alone. Getting the light close to the task is much more economical. A lamp 600 mm (2ft) away from a book

will give four times the amount of light on the page that it would if mounted 1200 mm (4ft) away on the ceiling. The amount of light on the task varies inversely as the square of the distance the source is from the task.

As well as getting the correct amount of light on the task in hand, it is also important to ensure that light levels from room to room and from one area to the next in the same room are not too uneven. For example, reading by a desk lamp, or watching television, with the rest of the room in darkness is to be avoided. Similarly, after doing close work in a bright light, moving into a dimly lit area will be dangerous because the eyes will have become adapted to a higher light level and it will take some time to become accustomed to the lower lighting level.

Particular attention should be given to dangerous areas such as stairs and landings, which are often inadequately lit in comparison with the rooms opening onto them.

It is also important to remember that most of the light that enters our eyes has not come direct from its source but has been reflected from the ceiling and walls and from objects in the room. Decor and colour schemes consequently have an enormous contribution to make to the amount of light available in an interior and large areas of very dark colours should be avoided. Care should be taken to avoid glare.

Glare is caused by having a source of light within, or very close to, the visual field, which is much brighter than the level to which the eye is adapted. The source of light need not be a lamp, although that is very common, but could be a window or a small light coloured surface reflecting a lot of light. Using a white chopping board may be difficult for this reason. With many glare sources a simple eye shade can be a great help. This may be a wide brimmed or peaked hat, or a tennis eye shade; even just shading the eyes with a hand can give a temporary improvement in seeing.

Daylight is an important source of light that is frequently wasted. The first requirement is that curtains should draw well clear of the window so as not to obstruct the light. If daytime privacy is

required only the very lightest of net curtains should be used. For the same reason, window frames and glazing bars should be light in colour. It is important that windows, like spectacles, should be kept clean to transmit the greatest amount of light.

It is also an advantage if the furniture can be arranged so that the light from the windows provides maximum benefit, e.g. by falling on the task from over the shoulder. Table lamps or floor stands should then be positioned to serve the furniture layout or, if the electric light is fixed (i.e. a ceiling pendant or wall bracket), an alternative reading position should be used when daylight is no longer adequate.

In the main, decoration of the walls should be of light colours. These will then reflect more light into the room and aid seeing by contrasting with furniture and other objects. Too bland a colour scheme, however, may make orientation difficult. Regular spring-cleaning and redecoration will ensure that the light reflected continues to be at a maximum. While gloss paint is easily cleaned, it should be remembered that large areas of gloss can reflect bright lights and may prove to be a glare source. Generally, matt or eggshell finishes are preferable.

Safe movement is aided if individuals appreciate exactly where they are at any time. Orientation can be aided aurally as well as visually. A loud ticking clock can be an aural focus while the use of bright or contrasting colours for certain surfaces or objects can provide a visual clue.

Door and door surrounds, handles, switches, plugs and sockets, crockery etc can all be made more conspicuous by being in contrasting colours to their immediate background.

**©The Partially Sighted Society
7/9 Bennetthorpe
Doncaster
DN2 6AA**