



Maintaining the Home:

Vision and Hearing Loss

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Vision Loss

Visual impairments are not the severe handicaps they are often imagined to be. There are many kinds of vision problems. Some people may find it hard to pick out details in their environment. They can see only large items or distinguish only shadow and light. Some people cannot see well when there is too much light, such as glare from highly polished floors and reflective wall coverings or bright light from direct lighting or windows. Others may not be able to see well in low light or their eyes may not respond quickly to abrupt changes in lighting. Depth perception also may be a problem, making it difficult to see steps, judge the height and depth of stair treads or see where one wall meets another.

Poor vision makes it hard to read clocks, telephone dials, touch pads, appliance controls, thermostats and printed material in general (recipes, food and medication labels, newspapers, books or telephone directories). This disability threatens one's safety and ability to live independently.

Modifications for Vision Loss

If more or better lighting is needed, try installing task lighting in selected spaces such as the kitchen, in reading areas, in the bathroom and on the stairs. There are stick-on or screw-in fluorescent lights that fit under kitchen cabinets and along stairwells and hallways; plug-in wall sconces or lamps; and plug-in ceiling swag lights. Light switches that glow in the dark also are available,

as are rheostats to adjust the intensity of lighting (for more or less brightness, as needed). A skylight can illuminate even the darkest room. Less costly than a skylight but giving the effect of one is a new technology called the light tube. This device is installed through a roof.

If bright light or glare causes a problem, use blinds or shades, coating on windows, non-glare or low-gloss finishes on floors and textured wallpaper or matte paint on walls.

It also is helpful to the person with a vision problem if visual cues are replaced with other sensory cues. For example, different floor surfaces (tile in the entrance foyer, carpeting in the living room, hardwood in the hall, vinyl in the kitchen, etc.) give tactile cues for navigation. Attaching sticky-backed felt to the smooth surface of a microwave oven's pressure pad can help one find the frequently used controls such as Reheat, 1 minute, Start and Clear. A talking microwave is another option.

Some people with low vision are helped by using bright, contrasting colors to differentiate walls, floors and counters. Colors or contrasting patterns might be used to distinguish the risers on stairs (the vertical parts) from the treads (the horizontal parts). Using white or reflecting tape to clearly mark changes in floor levels can prevent falls.

Visually impaired people can adapt successfully to most environments, especially the familiar spaces of their own homes.

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Hearing Loss

Hearing loss is a common disability, especially among older people. As people age, they often lose inner ear bone conductivity and/or nerve sensitivity. Some people have trouble hearing certain sounds, particularly soft ones. They might not be able to hear high tones, low tones or both. When listening to speech, they might not be able to understand certain words containing higher-pitched consonants. When there is background noise or several conversations are going on at once, understanding speech is even more difficult. Some people may have difficulty locating the source of sounds.

In the home, these problems can make it hard to hear doorbells, telephones, voices on the phone, televisions or radios. More important, people with hearing problems might not be able to hear warnings from smoke and fire alarms.

Modifications for Hearing Loss

One way to modify the home is to make auditory signals louder. Adding an amplifying device to a telephone or replacing an existing telephone with an amplified one can help. When amplification is not sufficient, auditory signals can be replaced with other sensory signals. A simple flashing light attached to a doorbell, telephone or timer, and a strobe light attached to the smoke alarm to distinguish it from the simple flashing light, are examples. Any emergency communication system should be equipped with either a visual or vibrating warning system.

A TDD (Telecommunications Device for the Deaf) enables a deaf person to communicate over the telephone. The user types out a message on a teletypewriter and the message is transmitted to a similar machine on the other end. Contact your telephone company for amplified handsets, signal devices, TDDs and extension bells. Ask for their special needs department.

A sound-activated device that shakes the bed and wakes a sleeping person can take the place of an alarm clock. It also can be attached to the fire alarm.

Another strategy is to try to decrease background noise. Installing insulating materials around noisy appliances such as dishwashers and washing machines, installing insulating materials on floors (e.g., soundproof sub-flooring covered with carpeting) and improving the home's acoustics to reduce sound transfer can accomplish this. Fabric window coverings also reduce noisiness and echoes.

*This resource is one in a series on **Maintaining the Home** which include:*

Interior Maintenance

Preventive Home Maintenance Checkup
Make a Basic Toolkit for Simple Home Repairs
Selection and Use of Home Cleaning Products
Discovering the Secrets of Successful Storage

Heating

Furnace Care
Fireplace and Chimney Care

Cooling

Evaporative Cooler
Air Conditioner
Ceiling Fans

Plumbing

Fixing Plugged Sink Drains
How to Unclog a Toilet
Repairing Dripping Faucets

Electrical

How to Set or Reset a Circuit Breaker
How to Replace a Fuse

Appliances

How to Buy an Energy Efficient Home Appliance
Choosing a Water Heater

Maintenance:

Dishwasher Care and Dishwasher Cleaning
Dryer Care and Dryer Cleaning
Freezer Care and Freezer Cleaning
Garbage Disposal Care and Cleaning
Range and Oven Care and Range Cleaning
Refrigerator Care and Refrigerator Cleaning
Small Electrical Appliance Care and Cleaning
Washer Care and Cleaning

Flooring

Buying new carpet
Carpet Care and Cleaning
Wood Floors Care and Cleaning
Ceramic Tile Floors Care and Cleaning
Vinyl Floor Coverings Care and Cleaning

Walls

Selecting and Applying Paint
Wallpaper Selection and Cleaning
Repairing Walls

Furniture

Furnishing Your New Home: Color and Design
Selecting Fabric For Home Furnishings

Exterior Maintenance

Home Exterior

Foundations, Basements and Yards
Exterior Walls, Windows, and Doors

Roof

A Guide To Roofs
Roof Maintenance

Landscaping and Lawn Care

Principles of Xeriscape
Watering Your Lawn

Home Safety

Child-Proofing Your Home
Is Your Home Safe From Fire Hazards?
Smoke Alarms Save Lives
Carbon Monoxide Alarms
Are Your Children Safe From Poisons?
Protecting Yourself Against Burglary

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Conservation

Weatherize Your Home
Easy Tips to Save Money and the Planet
How to Stop Air Leaks Around Windows
Energy-Efficient Heating and Cooling
Indoor Water Conservation Tips
Outdoor Water Conservation Tips

Environment Issues

Green Building
Reduce-Reuse-Recycle: Alternatives for Waste Management
Create a home recycling center
Healthy Indoor Air for New Mexico Homes
Dealing with Mold
Household Hazardous Waste
Hazardous Household Substances: Alternatives That Are Relatively Free of Toxic Effects
Radon

Pest Control

Cockroaches and Their Control
Southwest Insects

Accessible Living

Update your home for a lifetime of living
Vision Loss & Hearing Loss
Hand Dexterity, Strength and Range of Motion
Cognitive Difficulties
Mobility Impairments, Balance and Coordination

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