

Sight loss

A Jewish Care Interact Guide

Sight loss

Sight loss can have an impact on all aspects of your daily life—from travel to cooking to the feelings you have about losing your sight. With a good outlook and a few changes—some small and some not so small—you can lead a full and active life. Jewish Care Interact is here to help you do just that.

Sight loss affects people of all ages and ranges from mild impairment to total blindness. Some people lose their sight slowly over long periods of time. Some people may lose their sight quickly and then find it becomes stable. Others will fall somewhere in between.

The basics of living with sight loss are much the same for everyone, no matter how you came to lose your sight. So this section has something for everyone living with sight loss. It's full of useful information to help you be happy and independent.

Sight loss: at home

There are many conveniences available to ensure that you can have a full and stimulating life at home while living with sight loss.

Reading

If you love to curl up with a good book or relax and have a long read of the newspaper, there are lots of options you can choose.

Reading books, magazines and newspapers in print

If you can read printed material, but need it to be larger than the standard size of 10 to 12 point font, try using a magnifier or getting books in large or giant print.

Large print books are either 16 or 18 point font and giant print books are anything larger. You can take out large print books from your local library and [borrow giant print books from the RNIB](#). You can also [buy large or giant print books and magazines from the reading and learning section of RNIB's online shop](#).

Large print books are also available from the following outlets:

- [Amazon \(search the site for large print options\)](#)
- [W.F. Howes Ltd \(provider of large print books along with audiobooks and digital services\)](#)
- [Ulverscroft Large Print Books Ltd.](#)

To find [large and giant print books of Jewish interest, have a look at what JBI International has to offer](#).

The Big Print Newspaper is the only national weekly large print newspaper, which includes a TV and radio guide. [Subscribe to the Big Print Newspaper via the RNIB](#).

eBooks

If digital is your thing, you may want to try eBooks. An eBook is an electronic book, which is just the same as a print book, except that you read it using a device called an eBook reader (or eReader) or on an eBook app on your computer, smartphone or tablet. New eBooks are published at the same time

as print books and are either the same price or slightly cheaper than print books.

What's really great about eBooks is that you have more control over how you read them. All eBook readers allow you to enlarge text, and many allow you to change the shape, colour and contrast of text. Many eBook readers also enable electronic speech or can work with braille devices. As eBook readers and apps have many features to suit diverse needs, it is really a matter of finding the one that fits you.

Choosing an eBook reader or app

There are thousands of eBook readers and apps to choose from, so we've focused on the most popular ones amongst visually impaired people.

eBook readers

eBook readers tend to have their own libraries, so you can get both the reader and books from the same provider.

Here are some of the top providers of eBook readers:

- [Kindle eReader store](#)
- [Kobo eReader store](#)

Most major high street book, electrical and department stores sell eBook readers. If you're interested in them, don't be shy; just go in and ask for a demo.

eBook apps

Since most eBook apps are free, you may want to download one and try it out. Most eBook readers (including Kindle, Kobo and Nook) have free apps.

There are also popular and free apps like iBooks, Google Play Books and Adobe Digital Editions that you can use without an eBook reader.

- [iBooks can be used on Apple Mac computers and Apple mobile devices.](#)
- [Google Play books can be used on any computer and on Android devices.](#)
- [Adobe Digital Editions can be used on Windows PCs and Apple Macs.](#) This service is also available as an app for Apple mobile devices.

Getting the lighting right

Making sure you have the right kind of lighting will make reading more enjoyable. The type of lighting that will be right for you will depend on the cause of your sight loss, but it really comes down to what works best for you. You may prefer natural lighting, floor lamps, a mix of table lamps and overhead lighting or some other combination. Try out a range of lighting options to find the best set up for you.

To find out more about your lighting possibilities, [visit the RNIB's site and check out the page that covers adapting the lighting in your home, where you will be able to download the organisation's Lighting Solutions Guide.](#)

Braille

If braille is the format you prefer, you can find a lot more than just books in braille. From books, magazines and newspapers to labels on all sorts of products, braille readers in the UK have plenty of choices. To find out more about braille products, check out the [Products and publications in braille page of the RNIB website](#).

[For Jewish interest braille books, have a look at the JBI International online catalogue.](#)

Talking news and books

Staying informed about current events and enjoying the latest best seller should be a pleasure, not a challenge. By listening to talking news and books, you can stay up to date at your own comfortable pace, even if you experience sight loss or are partially sighted...or if you can't hold printed media due to other health conditions.

What kinds of books, magazines and newspapers can I request?

High quality audio versions of the following items are available on loan throughout the UK.

- National and local newspapers
- Standard magazines and niche publications
- TV listings
- Radio guides
- Textbooks that support continuing education
- Thousands of books (ranging from bestsellers, mysteries, science fiction, biographies, religious works and more)

How are talking news and books formatted, and how can I get them delivered to me?

Back in the 1970s, talking books and magazines were recorded onto audio cassettes. As people found out about this standard service, it became more popular and moved ahead into newer, more advanced formats. For instance, CDs or USB sticks are very portable. And reading material that's sent straight to your computer, tablet or smartphone can be streamed directly to you—on demand and at your convenience.

But if you don't have a computer, there are handy speciality players that come in desktop or portable models. These devices play recordings that have been reformatted to work easily with the supporting technology.

Several organisations will deliver the news or books to your doorstep, and then you can return the materials free of charge when you have finished. Other companies charge a fee for their offerings but allow you to keep the items forever. This is helpful if you want to build your own personal audio library.

Great reading is available to everyone. Just check out the resources listed below to stay connected to the world of words.

Organisations that offer talking books:

- [Bookshare.org online library for people with print disabilities](#) (free through Dyslexia Action)
- [Calibre Audio Library](#)
- [Listening Books](#)
- [LoyalBooks.com, free public domain audiobooks and eBook downloads](#) (formerly Books Should Be Free)
- [OverDrive.com access to eBooks, audiobooks and more from local public libraries](#)
- [RNIB talking books service](#)

Organisations that offer talking news and magazines:

- [Infosound, providers of information for people with print disabilities](#)
- [RNIB newsagent](#)
- [Talking News Federation for your local newspaper \(if available\)](#)

Commercial sellers of talking books:

- [Audible.co.uk audiobooks](#), an Amazon company (also provides apps for iPhone, Android and Windows Phone formats and supports tablet and computer reading)
- [Penguin audiobooks](#)
- [TheWorks.co.uk audiobooks](#)

Watching films and TV

Just because you have sight loss doesn't mean you can't enjoy your favourite films and TV programmes, thanks to Audio Description (AD). AD is narration that describes what is happening on-screen in a film, TV programme or even at a live event. AD is available on many TV programmes broadcast in the UK, as well as DVDs to rent or buy.

To learn more about AD, check out the [Audio description page on the RNIB website](#).

Cooking

If you enjoy cooking, whether for yourself or for family and friends, losing your sight doesn't mean you have to stop making your prize winning matzo ball soup or any other family favourites. It does mean that you'll need to adapt how you cook and you'll also need to make some changes to your kitchen to keep you safe.

Kitchen gadgets galore

We've asked all the visually impaired balabustas we know for the top kitchen gadgets they use to keep them cooking safely. Here are our top 10:

1. **Coloured chopping boards.** The contrast between what you want to chop and each coloured chopping board is a huge help. Potatoes on black, tomatoes on yellow, and so on.

2. **Coloured mixing bowls.** The use of contrast in mixing bowls with different colours on the inside helps with seeing what you are mixing.
3. **Liquid level indicators.** If you want to make yourself a drink, this little gadget is what you need. You just put the indicator on the side of your cup, pour the liquid into the cup and the device beeps when it's full. It even has two levels for tea and coffee before and after you add milk.
4. **Large digit or talking weighing scales.** If you still have some useful vision, large digit scales may work for you. Otherwise, talking scales will speak weights out to you.
5. **Colour coded or talking measuring cups and spoons.** You can get colour coded measuring cups and spoons to tell which one is which. You can also find cups and spoons that speak the measures out to you.
6. **Talking thermometers.** If you want to know how hot your knishes are before you serve them, but struggle to see the tiny markings on a regular thermometer, then a talking thermometer is for you.
7. **Talking labels.** Talking labels are ideal for working out which jar the borscht is in and which one contains the pickles.
8. **Talking timers.** To make sure your kugel is just right, a talking timer will be a great help.
9. **Bump dots.** These tactile, self-adhesive rubber dots are great to use to find out what's what in your kitchen. You can use them on the knobs on your hob—one dot for the lowest heat and two close together for the highest.
10. **Anything made by Good Grips.** The Good Grips range of products grip just where you need them to stop you from slipping.

Home adaptations

Making adjustments to your home to make living with sight loss easier can prove costly. In the UK, local councils may provide grants for home adaptations, and this varies from council to council.

[To find out about making home adaptations in Northern Ireland, please visit the Housing Executive website.](#)

Sight loss: technology

The range of technology available for visually impaired people is great and growing. Products are available in both the mainstream technology and assistive technology marketplaces. If this all sounds a bit too complicated for you, let us break it down.

Assistive technology

Assistive technology refers to technologies that are made to support people with specific impairments. For visually impaired people, these fall into three main categories:

1. Screen readers
2. Magnifiers
3. Braille devices

Screen readers

A screen reader is a piece of software that reads the text on a screen out loud. Screen readers are available on desktop computers, laptops, smartphones and tablets.

All Apple Mac products have an in-built screen reader called VoiceOver. Windows PCs do not have an in-built screen reader and require additional screen reader software.

Magnifiers

There are two main categories of magnifiers. The first being magnifiers that are used to magnify printed material and the second being computer software used to magnify what is on the screen.

Magnifiers used for printed material range from handheld low-tech dome magnifiers to electronic video magnifiers.

Magnification software is sometimes sold on its own and sometimes sold along with a screen reader.

All Apple Mac products have an inbuilt magnifier called Zoom. Windows PCs do not have an inbuilt magnifier and require additional magnification software.

Braille devices

Braille devices, also known as Refreshable Braille Displays are electromechanical devices that use a keyboard style device to display braille characters.

Mainstream technology

Mainstream technology is technology that is designed for everyone to use. For people with sight loss, there are many mainstream technologies that are very helpful, such as dictation software or voice recognition like Siri.

Apps that are making living with sight loss easier

We've asked around and have discovered that a lot of visually impaired people are using iPhones. So, for now, our list is focused on iOS devices—that is, iPhones and iPads.

If you're visually impaired, using a different platform and want to let us know about the apps you love, please drop us an email at contact@jewishcareinteract.org.

All Apple mobile devices have inbuilt dictation and voice recognition (Siri). So, visually impaired people already have a head start.

In addition to this, we've heard great things about these apps.

Dictate is a dictation app that allows you to speak to it and it types what you speak into a document. **Fantastical** is a calendar app with an incredibly simple and easy to use interface and high contrast, so it's fab for people with sight loss.

Character Writer is a plain text writing app that allows users to increase the font size and to invert colours so that text is white on black.

Be My Eyes is an app that enables visually impaired people to get help via a network of sighted volunteers using video chat.

Text Grabber is an optical character recognition (OCR) app. It allows you to take a photo of printed text and then converts it to digital text. From there, you can either read the text as is or use VoiceOver.

Audible is an audiobook player app. You simply purchase your books from the Audible website and then download them to your phone and listen.

BlindSquare is an app designed specifically for visually impaired people. When you open the app, it works out where you are and then speaks to you about what's in the area around you, such as shops, cinemas, roads, restaurants and so on.

To find out more about technology for blind and partially sighted people, please visit the [Using technology section on the RNIB website](#).

Sight loss: out and about

Living with sight loss doesn't mean you have to give up a hobby or leisure pursuit you enjoy. And you can always find new activities to broaden your horizons or get the most out of hobbies you already love.

Travel

As we know all too well, travelling with a disability often requires careful and creative problem solving. Lack of accessibility, amenities and understanding are just some of the barriers we face as disabled travellers and companions. Still, you are more than entitled to get the most out of your travel experience, and the [GOV.UK site can provide you with an overview of Transport if you're disabled](#).

This guide has been designed to provide clear direction for before, after and during travel to ensure a trouble-free trip. Knowing what to expect makes life a lot easier and less stressful. So without further ado, let's get the accessible basics covered.

Flying

As disability facilities and services vary widely, it is worth doing some research before you decide which airline to use. Here are a few pointers to bear in mind when travelling by air. On booking your flight, remember to notify the airline that you require assistance; at least 48 hours before your flight departs, make sure you contact the airline and remind them once again. Finally, at flight check in, be sure to tell the ticket agent that you requested special assistance. In doing this you

will receive extra help at security, miss long queues (there have to be some perks!) and will receive assistance at the gate. Once at the entrance of the plane, you will be met with flight attendants who will help you.

You do have a right to travel with your assistance dog, but you'll need to follow the rules found on the GOV.UK website, [Pet travel: entering and returning to the UK](#).

Travelling by train

National Rail has worked long and hard over the last few years to improve accessibility. Rail travel is now one of the most accessible means of transport for those with a disability. With the right information, planning and know-how, travelling by train can be hassle free. Let's get on board!

To start off, it is useful to identify the barriers that might affect your journey and then consider the different options available and next steps. If you have a sight impairment, it is recommended that you book passenger assistance. Please note this booking should be made at least 24 hours prior to your journey. Whether it is help getting on and off the train, buying tickets or getting guidance through the station, passenger assistance will have it covered.

To book passenger assistance with the relevant train company you are travelling with, simply navigate to the "Support and Information" section on the company's contact page. Once there, scroll down to "Assisted Travel" to retrieve the relevant contact details. Once on the phone to them, be sure to outline your requirements clearly so they can tailor their services to your needs accordingly.

If you would rather contact them via the web, you can [book online via the Disabled Persons Railcard website](#); look for the "Book Assistance for Future Journey" button on the page.

Alternatively, you can call National Rail Enquiries on 0345 748 4950.

If you are unsure which train company you need, take a look at the [National Rail's list of Stations services and facilities](#). These pages will show you details of facilities available at each station under the "Access Information" section of the chart on that page.

Travelling by bus

The bus business is experiencing a boom these days, perhaps due to attractive fares and schedules. In terms of relaying information, buses have become more user-friendly. And come 2017, all public transport buses will have to meet specific disability standards set by the government. As we wait patiently for this day, we will have to make do with the current provisions.

As a disabled person, you may be eligible for a free bus pass—check with your local council to find out. At the very least, you are entitled to a free off-peak pass on any bus, which allows you to travel anywhere in England between 9.30 am and 11 pm Monday to Friday and anytime at weekends. For further details on this scheme, [visit the GOV.UK site and go to the section on Transport if you're disabled, where you'll find details on cars, buses and coaches](#).

How do I apply for a bus pass? Simply contact your local council to find out who issues disabled bus passes. To apply for a disabled person's bus pass, you first need to identify the appropriate local authority. Go to the [Directgov site and follow the steps on how to apply for a disabled person's bus pass](#). This service is only available in England.

Getting on and off. Bus companies are legally obliged to make sure disabled people can get on and off buses in safety and travel in reasonable comfort. Visit [Citizens Advice to find out the Rights of disabled passengers using buses and coaches](#).

Using public transport in London

There are many resources to help you tame the Tube and beat the buses when travelling in London.

Transport for London

In addition to all of the traditional services offered through the Transport for London (TfL) website, there is an entire section [devoted to transport accessibility](#). For instance, did you know you could request staff assistance at all Tube, TfL Rail, Overground stations, boats, the Emirates Air Line and Victoria Coach Stations? You can get assistance from drivers on trams and buses (on DLR trains, look for a Passenger Service Agent).

[TfL also offers a travel support card that you can download](#) and use in order to let people know what assistance you may need. And for information on fares, visit the [60+ London Oyster Card section of the TfL website](#).

Transport for All

Transport for All (TfA) is an organisation that is working to make it just as easy for you to travel on public transport as it is for anyone else. Formerly Dial-A-Ride and Taxicard users (DaRT), TfA is a great place to find how public transport is becoming more accessible to everyone, and it covers:

- Underground
- Buses
- Trains
- DLR
- Tramlink
- Riverboats
- The Emirate Airline (Cable Car)
- Airports

TfA also has information on getting travel training or mentoring and tracking down items that have been lost on London's transport system.

In terms of door to door services, TfA can help you research the following:

- Dial-a-Ride
- Capital Call

- Community transport
- Patient transport
- Taxicard
- Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle

The organisation can also help you explore the following concessionary services:

- Blue Badge
- Freedom Pass
- Disabled and Older Persons Railcard
- National Express Coachcard
- 60+ Oystercard

Freedom Pass

To find out specifically about Freedom Passes, visit the London Councils Freedom Pass website.

Sight loss: emotions and relationships

Living with a disability can have an impact on your emotional life. It can affect the way you feel about yourself and those around you.

The physical limitations that you experience, as well as others' attitudes towards your impairment, can sometimes be very frustrating. You may also experience feelings of social isolation and loneliness, so having a good social and support network is vital.

Emotional wellbeing

You may not make an immediate connection between sight loss and emotional wellbeing, but sight loss is indeed a loss; allowing yourself to come to terms with that loss is fundamental to your emotional wellbeing.

How you do this will depend on your general emotional wellbeing as well as your existing social and support network. You may find that you're able to talk it through with family and friends, or you may find that counselling is best for you. What matters is that you stay well and balanced, and take steps to ensure that feelings of sadness or depression are handled with care.

Counselling via your GP

Depending on where you live, you may be able to get counselling via your GP. If this is not available, you can ask your GP to refer you to a local organisation that may be able to help.

Emotional support services

The RNIB has [an emotional support service for visually impaired people, which can be accessed via the Emotional support service page of the RNIB website.](#)

If you prefer to find emotional support tailored specifically for Jewish people, contact [Jewish Care Direct](#) at 0208 922 2222. The Jewish Helpline can also assist you. That number is 0800 652 9249.

[For general emotional support any time of day or night, the Samaritans are there to help.](#)

Relationships with friends, family and colleagues

Unless you have other disabilities or health conditions, you probably won't have great care needs because of your visual impairment, but this doesn't mean that you don't need help or support in some of your daily activities, and this support usually comes from friends, family and colleagues.

If you are fiercely independent, you may find asking for help quite difficult. If you can look at asking for help as being in control of your dependencies, rather than not being independent, this can be quite life changing. It is incredibly liberating to be okay with asking people around you to help. If you are clear and upfront with people and don't ask them to do things you are perfectly capable of doing, you will find people incredibly accommodating.

Relationships, in general, are pretty complicated, so understanding and being in control of your needs ensures that having a visual impairment does not make your relationships any more so.

