

Using technology

Mobile phones and computers can help with some of the communication difficulties associated with sight loss.

This leaflet is available on audio CD.

No one need face macular degeneration alone.
For information and support call 0300 3030 111.

Introduction

Technology is becoming an essential part of day-to-day life for people with low vision.

This leaflet introduces a selection of technology that may help to overcome some of the communication difficulties associated with sight loss.

Even if you feel technology is not your thing, our members often tell us that learning a few skills on their tablet computer or smartphone makes a huge difference, helping them to stay in touch with family and

continue much-loved hobbies. It may be worthwhile asking friends or family to help you when starting out.

Smart speakers



Google Home

Advances in voice-activation technology, such as the Amazon Echo, Google Home and Apple HomePod allow

you to control your computer, mobile phone and even lights and heating **using your voice alone.**

With a smart speaker, you can:

- Play music
- Request recipes
- Check the weather
- Control your TV
- Set reminders and alarms
- Take notes
- Get answers to a variety of questions
- Play games.

Tablets and e-book readers

Tablet computers may enable you to continue reading books and magazines, as well as access other information.

There are many types of tablet, but the most familiar ones are the Apple iPad, Samsung Galaxy Note and Kindle Fire.

Tablets are smaller alternatives to a portable computer. Their versatility and accessibility features mean you can easily browse the web, write large format notes or

read an e-book. You can also increase text size and screen contrast, and they may include screenreading and magnification options.

Many publications, including newspapers, are now available in electronic format and tablets let you read these by changing the basic settings to make text or images larger. There will also be options to alter the background colours to improve contrast and readability.

Smartphones

There is a wide range of phones available,

from the simple to the more sophisticated.

At one end of the spectrum are simple handsets designed to offer a few functions with maximum accessibility. Typically these will allow you to make and receive phone calls and text messages using a tactile keypad. Examples include the Alto 2 and Doro PhoneEasy range.

Screen contrast and text size can be easily adjusted.

Models like the Alto 2 also have a read aloud option that converts menus and messages



Alto 2



Doro PhoneEasy

Basic mobile phones with easy to change colour and text settings

from text to speech. These phones also allow you to set a one-button shortcut for the numbers you use most often.

At the other end of the scale are smartphones like the Apple iPhone and Samsung Galaxy, which have many advanced accessibility features.

Enlarged text and text-to-speech

Most smartphones have a large screen and the option to enlarge text, or read it out loud.

Intelligent assistant

These built-in voice assistants, such as 'Siri' on the iPhone, work like a smart speaker.

They allow you to dial contacts, dictate messages and emails, and search the internet.

You can also ask it everyday questions such as ‘What’s the time?’ or ‘Will I need my umbrella today?’, and get a spoken reply.

Camera functions

As well as taking photographs, a smartphone camera also enables you to ‘zoom in’ on objects, just like you would with a magnifier.

Apps

A key feature of tablets and smartphones are

apps - downloadable bits of software.

Listed below are some of the most useful apps for people with a visual impairment.

MD_evReader presents text from e-books in



a scrolling stream across the screen. For more information, visit www.macularsociety.org/reading-app

Seeing AI harnesses artificial



intelligence to describe objects and people, read printed text and narrate the world around you.

TapTapSee

uses the phone's camera to take an image of an object and the audio function to speak the description.



Magnifying glass with light

enables the user to 'zoom in' on text and objects up to 10x. Great for reading menus and receipts.



Kindle turns your iPhone or iPad into a Kindle, enabling you to read e-books wherever you are.



Apps can be downloaded via the app

store on your tablet or smartphone.

Computers and laptops

There are a number of simple adaptations you can make to your computer to make it even easier.

Keyboards

Keyboards with illuminated and large keys are available, and coloured bump-ons can be added to important keys on keyboards to make typing easier.

Magnification

Windows and Apple computers both have

in-built settings to control screen magnification, contrast and text size. Some newer computers even include basic screenreading software.

Our Tech Talk volunteers can help you with smartphones, tablets and computers through email or telephone support. Call the Helpline on 0300 3030 111.

Remote sharing

If you need help with your computer, it may be worth setting up remote sharing with a family member or friend. This will enable them to access your computer

over the internet. It will allow you both to see your computer screen and means that someone many miles away can help you solve problems without having to be there in person.

For Windows-based systems, Remote sharing options can be found in the Control Panel. For Apple computers, you will need to look in the Sharing folder in System Preferences.

Television

If watching television is becoming uncomfortable, the following tips may help you.

Seating position

In the first instance, it may help to sit closer to the TV. By halving the distance, you're creating 2x magnification.

TV type

Large-screen, high-definition (HD) TVs may benefit you. A backlit LCD model may offer more clarity too.

MaxTV glasses

MaxTV glasses have two individually adjustable lenses on standard frames, and could allow you to sit a more comfortable distance from the TV screen. MaxTV glasses are available to buy, and

from some low vision clinics. Not everyone will find them useful, so do try before buying.

Audio description

Some TV programmes offer an accompanying audio description. The BBC currently provides this for 20% of their schedule.

This narration is additional to the programme's original soundtrack and provides a verbal description of the visual content. Typically it will describe scenery, a character's appearance or facial expression, and what is going on in the scene.

Audio description options can be found under 'Settings' in your TV's main menu.

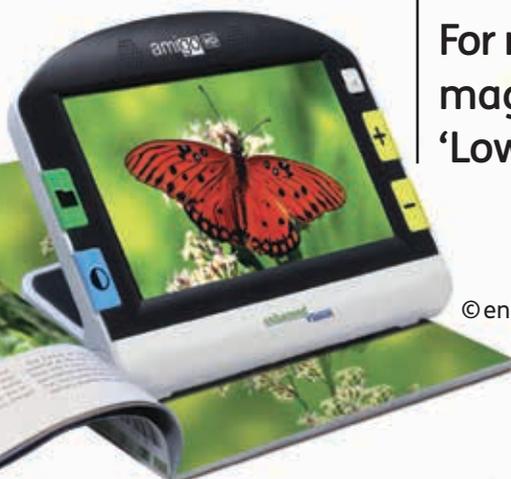
Magnifiers

Magnifiers provide visually impaired users with an enlarged view of printed materials and small objects. They range from pocket-size magnifiers to larger, table-top versions. Most have a range of contrast options (e.g. black text on white background, or

black text on a yellow background).

Some magnifiers also let you take 'snapshots' so you can create a still image of an object or text and then adjust the contrast options or magnification. Snapshots are particularly useful with a portable pocket-size reader when looking at something like a timetable at a bus stop or a wall-mounted information board.

For more information on magnifiers, see our 'Low vision aids' leaflet.



© enhanced vision

How the Macular Society can help

Make our Helpline your first point of contact for your questions about using technology.

0300 3030 111

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm

help@macularsociety.org

www.macularsociety.org

As well as the Helpline, our services include:

Skills for Seeing – we train volunteers to teach two techniques (eccentric viewing and steady eye strategy) that can help you use your vision more effectively.

Gadget Guides – tips on using gadgets and technology to help people adapt to living with sight loss.

Counselling – confidential telephone support from a professional counsellor.

Support groups – we have hundreds of local groups around the UK.

Befriending – particularly helpful for those who find it hard to get out and about.

Six months free membership

If you would like to receive regular updates about living with macular conditions, treatments and medical research to find a cure then membership is for you.

Join for free today by calling 01264 350 551 or go to www.macularsociety.org/6months



Macular Society

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