Magnification and Magnifiers

For many people with low vision the inability to read creates the greatest hardship. Fortunately, there are many magnification devices that can help. The purpose of magnification is to increase the size of the retinal image so that you can see print or objects more easily.

This article focuses on three common types of magnifiers

- Hand magnifiers
- Stand magnifiers
- Spectacle magnifiers

There is no one best magnifier for everyone and in fact one individual may use different types of magnification to perform different tasks.

What do I need to consider when selecting a magnifier?

First
Think about the tasks and activities you want to accomplish.

Second
Your field of view (what you see through a magnifier) depends on the strength and design of the magnifier. For instance, the stronger a magnifier is, the smaller its field of view will be and the closer you will have to hold it to the material you are viewing.

Third
High-powered magnifiers require special training and additional practice for effective use. Therefore, you need to consider your level of motivation to learn new skills.

Fourth
Be aware that any limitations created by your eye condition or other physical conditions can impact the effectiveness of the magnifiers you use.
**Types of magnifiers**

**Hand-held magnifiers** are the most common type of magnification as people generally find them comfortable and easy to use. They are portable, relatively lightweight, and can be used with or without glasses. The distance between the eye and the lens is easy to adjust to improve focus and viewing field size. Hand-held magnifiers are ideal for individuals using Preferred Retina Location (PRL) or eccentric viewing which is the practice of locating the clearest area of vision and using it to enhance reading ability. Hand-held magnifiers are available with illumination.

These magnifiers must be held with a steady hand at the needed focal distance to obtain maximum benefit. Those with tremors may find hand-held magnifiers difficult to use.

**Stand magnifiers** have a preset focal distance and rest directly on the surface of the reading material. Some have self-contained illumination, which is perfect for users who need more light. Stand magnifiers are beneficial to users who cannot steadily hold a magnifier or need magnification for longer periods of time.

Be aware that stand magnifiers have a reduced visual field, so in order to widen the visual field, the user must move closer to the magnifier. Moving closer can prove physically taxing for some. In addition, the user must look directly into the lens, viewing from an angle can cause distortion. Lastly, the design of some stand magnifiers obstructs writing utensils, making writing difficult.

**Both hand and stand magnifiers** are designed to help with short-term tasks that require the user to work closely with the material. Typical uses include reading newspapers, recipes, labels, or mail, scanning store prices or news headlines, looking up phone numbers, and viewing dials, gauges, or appliance controls.

**Spectacle magnifiers (magnifying glasses)** have strong lenses and are worn just for reading or other near vision tasks. They may utilize regular or half-eye frames. They allow an individual to keep hands free for writing, crafting, and turning pages. They have a larger visual field compared to hand and stand magnifiers as they are worn closer to the eye. Reading glasses do have a shorter working distance than conventional glasses and require the user to hold material closer than normal.
Many stores carry over-the-counter (OTC) low powered versions of hand, stand, and spectacle magnifiers which often aren’t strong enough to help individuals with low vision. SightConnection offers prescription strength magnifiers, telescopes, closed circuit television systems, and training for PRL and reading techniques to enable individuals to use their remaining vision as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Prescription devices along with training are provided through the SightConnection Low Vision Clinic. A patient’s remaining vision is assessed by Low Vision staff to determine which LV devices and training will allow each individual to use his/her vision the most effectively. Also covered in the clinic are simple adjustments to lighting, reducing glare, and increasing contrast to enhance vision.

If you or someone you know will benefit from additional information on magnification and magnifiers please contact the SightConnection office.
Our mission
“Enhancing the ability of people with vision loss to lead active, independent lives.”

Programs and services
• Low vision rehabilitation
• Low vision clinic
• Instruction in independent living skills
• Professional counseling
• Safe travel and orientation training
• Education, information and referral services
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• Adaptive aids specialty store

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