

# #HenshawsLifeHacks

52 tips and tricks for living life with a visual impairment



## Themes

Around your home

Travel

Entertainment

In the kitchen

Money

Technology

In the garden

**henshaws**

*beyond expectations*

**At Henshaws we support and celebrate the achievements of people living with visual impairment. Every day we enable people to go beyond their expectations and that can mean starting small, with the day to day stuff. Our aim is that visual impairment doesn't mean the end of an independent, fulfilling life so we've compiled 52 of our best tips for everyday living – one for every week of the year!**

They're aimed at people who have low vision but many of them will also work for those who have no vision at all.

The booklet has been designed to give you just a flavour of what can be done but we would recommend that you get in touch with our trained team for more comprehensive information, advice and guidance.



# Around your home



Your home is where you should feel most comfortable and relaxed, but it may need some adaptations to make it safe to live in if you're visually impaired...

- 1 Make it easy to locate electrical outlets and light switches, oven dials and doorknobs by using colour contrasts. You can use a coloured card boarder around a light switch for example.
- 2 Move furniture out of the main traffic areas in your home, and keep chairs pushed in.
- 3 In your wardrobe you can develop your own system of identifying clothes and colours by using safety pins, i.e. put no safety pins on red clothes, 1 safety pin on blue clothes etc.

**You can also use a colour reader**

**or a free colour detection app**

- 4 Add a railing to your stairs to help identify the top and the bottom. On the handrail place a sticky bump near to the top and bottom, to warn the hand rail is ending soon.
- 5 Having different textures under foot as you enter different rooms can help to orientate yourself around your home, such as tiles, wood, carpet and rugs. Beware with rugs, as they can be a trip hazard.



# #HenshawsLifeHacks

## Around your home

- 6 When ironing choose a solid-colour ironing board cover, rather than one with a pattern, to provide contrast with the garment. Always follow the cord to locate the iron safely.
- 7 If you're struggling to find a small item you've dropped on the floor, such as an earring, use your Hoover attachment with a thin sock or stocking over the end and Hoover the area. You should find the item stuck at the end of the attachment.
- 8 When managing your household bills nearly all utility providers and retailers can send you your bills/receipts via email. Just give them a call to set this up.
- 9 When doing your laundry keep socks together by clipping or safety-pinning matching socks as soon as you take them off. They can go into the washer and dryer that way and stay matched. Try using a clothes peg to clip your shoes together in pairs.
- 10 If you are registered blind or visually impaired you are entitled to 50% discount on your TV license.
- 11 An occupational therapist or rehab officer can assess whether you need more serious adaptations to your home and advise on what would best meet your needs. If they agree that you need adaptations to your home, you may be advised about a Disabled Facilities Grant.



**Find out about applying for a needs assessment here.**



henshaws

beyond expectations

#HenshawsLifeHacks



# In the kitchen



Making your own meals is an essential life skill and one that you don't need to lose because of sight loss...



email to a friend

(3)

in the kitchen

# #HenshawsLifeHacks

## In the kitchen

- 12 Use coloured card or sticky paper to line your cupboards to create contrast with the contents.
- 13 Organise your tins and dry food so that the same products are kept on certain shelves, for example, in one cupboard you may keep cat food on the bottom shelf and tins of soup on the second shelf.
- 14 Use elastic bands around different products to help identify them. For example, one elastic band on tins of soup, two elastic bands on tins of tomatoes, three elastic bands on tins of chickpeas, etc. You could use this technique on various products, such as cereal boxes, salt and pepper and herbs and spices.
- 15 When setting the table use contrast, for example, if you have white plates use a dark place mat or tablecloth.
- 16 When pouring liquids use a liquid level indicator or use a one-cup kettle when making hot drinks.
- 17 Try using a pizza cutter instead of a knife for slicing things like sandwiches, or try an adjustable knife attached to a cutting board.
- 18 Use different coloured plastic chopping boards so that you can use one that contrasts with the food you're chopping, for example, use a red one when chopping an onion and a white one when chopping a pepper.
- 19 When chopping an onion keep the onion stable and avoid any cuts by using a metal afro hair comb. Insert the comb into the onion and the make the cuts between the teeth of the comb.
- 20 Use a measuring cup with raised numbers on the side or mark the cup with tactile 3D stickers (bump ons).
- 21 Use long arm oven gloves when removing hot items from the oven.
- 22 If you struggle with spreading things on bread or toast try using the back of a spoon instead of a knife.



**henshaws**

beyond expectations

#HenshawsLifeHacks

In the garden



Many people find gardening a very relaxing and therapeutic pass time. With some careful consideration there's no need to stop because of sight loss...



email to a friend

(5)

in the garden

# #HenshawsLifeHacks

## In the garden

- 23 If you are just starting to garden with sight loss make sure you get to know your garden and are familiar with the layout. Get all the tools you'll need together to save trips back and forth to the shed or garage. Try and keep your storage area tidy and you'll be able to find your tools more easily.
- 24 Choose tools that have bright handles or paint the handles white if that suits your eye condition better.
- 25 Weeding is difficult but with some sighted help at first you can practise recognising common weeds by touch and smell. Some visually impaired gardeners find it useful to place visible items upright in the soil in front of treasured plants. You could use a bright item like an orange pen.
- 26 Try to choose shrubs that don't need a lot of pruning and plants that are low maintenance.
- 27 If you do need to prune choose buds that are pointing outwards from the body of the shrub. Make your first cut and then tie a piece of string at that point. Use the position of the string to check the length of branches/shoots for your next cuts. Alternatively, you can tie short lengths of string onto all the branches you want to cut back before you start.
- 28 When mowing a lawn you can use an RNIB sound beacon at one end of the lawn. Mow towards the sound beacon, then move it 30cm and return to your starting point and move the mower 30cm. Then mow towards the beacon again. If maintaining a lawn is too difficult you could consider replacing it with a different surface, such as paving, pebbles or artificial grass.





henshaws

beyond expectations

#HenshawsLifeHacks



Travel

The ability to travel is the key skill to maintaining your independence. Dedicate some time to learning your routes and follow our top tips...



email to a friend

(7)

travel

## Travel

- 29 We're all about independence but when it comes to travel don't be shy about asking for assistance. When using airports, hotels, taxis, trains, trams and buses – we find staff are always happy to help. At train stations and airports for example, staff are trained to meet you and guide you to your connection or pick up point. Just give them a call in advance to arrange.
- 30 When hailing a bus carry the number of the bus you want on a piece of A4 paper or use a bus hailer, **available from us**. When you get on the bus tell the driver where you want to get off and ask him or her to let you know when you're there.
- 31 When travelling on trams you may not be able to read the destination on the front of the tram but most modern services have an automated voice, which reads out the destination at each station. You just need to stand near the doors as they open to hear the voice.
- 32 At train stations listen out for announcements and ask a member of staff to guide you to the platform if you're not familiar with the layout of the station.
- 33 If you have a smart phone you can use GPS to identify your location and get directions to your destination. Google Maps for example gives walking directions with notifications given through voice guidance.
- 34 If you're registered blind or visually impaired you can get free or discounted travel on buses, trams and trains so get in touch with your local council.
- 35 Plan your journey as thoroughly as possible and always carry the number of a trusted taxi service in case anything goes wrong.



# Money



Managing your money can seem daunting when you have little or no vision but with a few tricks you will soon feel much more confident...



## Money

- 36 When drawing out cash select an accessible cash point such as Barclays and Santander machines. Carry a set of headphones that can be plugged in to the cash point from which you will get audio instructions.
- 37 Organise your cash in a wallet with three compartments so that you keep your £5, £10 and £20 notes separately.
- 38 If you don't have a three compartment wallet use a folding technique to differentiate between notes. £5 notes are not folded, £10 notes folded in half and £20 notes folded twice. Organise your cash before you leave the house.
- 39 To differentiate between debit/credit cards you can cut a small notch in the side of the card. One notch for a credit card and two notches for your debit card for example. Be careful not to cut in to the magnetic strip.
- 40 Make sure you're aware of all the benefits and welfare rights that you are entitled to. The type or sum of benefits you can get may change depending on your age, circumstances, living arrangements, learning or working status. Speak to your local authority to find out about the benefits available to people with a visual impairment. This includes Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Personal Independence Payments (PIP), Attendance Allowance (AA) and tax credits.





## Entertainment

Many people think visual mediums such as film and art are no longer enjoyable for someone with a visual impairment but that's simply not the case...

# #HenshawsLifeHacks

## Entertainment

- 41 All major cinemas run audio described versions of the latest films. A narration track, listened to through special headphones, fills the gap between dialogue by describing what is happening on screen. You can attend the screening with sighted friends as the experience doesn't affect other spectators' experience.
- 42 Audio description is also available on your TV. All the major channels are committed to audio describing at least 6% of their annual output. The BBC is now audio describing 20% of its content and programmes include popular soaps, dramas, comedies and children's programmes. Audio description is free and is available on any digital TV service.
- 43 There are a number of services available now that provide audio books, which you can download to your phone, tablet, lap top or mp3 player. You can also check out free audio books from the local library.
- 44 Many of your favourite actors, comedians and musicians will produce their own podcast that you can download and listen to in your leisure time.
- 45 Attending museums and galleries may seem off limits due to the largely visual nature of the exhibits, but many venues have handling collections these days, as well as audio described tours you can access from headphones and tours from gallery staff. Tell the museum or gallery staff you are visually impaired and they will help you to get the most out of our visit.
- 46 RNIB produce and sell puzzles and crosswords in braille or large print. They also have a wide range of adapted games and toys for everyone to enjoy, including Scrabble, Snakes and Ladders, Connect 4 and Monopoly.



**#HenshawsLifeHacks**

# Technology - Apps

There's a world of technology out there that can support visually impaired people to live more independently. Here we're just going to focus on apps and have selected six of our favourites...



# #HenshawsLifeHacks

## Technology - Apps

- 47 **Be My Eyes** is a relatively new app that connects blind people with sighted volunteers from around the world via live video chat. A visually impaired person requests assistance through the app with something they need help with, which could be anything from knowing the expiry date on the milk to navigating new surroundings.
- 48 **BeSpecular** is very new and works in a similar way to Be My Eyes by recruiting sighted volunteers but the visually impaired person takes a photo of what he or she needs help with and attaches a voice message.
- 49 **TapTapSee** is a mobile camera application for iOS users. The app uses the iDevice's camera and VoiceOver functions to photograph objects and identify them out loud for the user. From the app you simply double tap on the device's screen to photograph any two or three dimensional object at any angle and it will be analyzed, and defined within seconds.
- 50 **Overdrive** allows you to borrow eBooks, audiobooks, and more from your local public library - anywhere, anytime.
- 51 **Wayfindr** explores the potential of audio wayfinding systems in various environments. They are currently working with London Underground to set up the system there but hope to work with all transport systems, venues, hospitals, shopping centres, etc, watch this space...
- 52 **Aipoly** uses artificial intelligence to identify objects. You don't need to take pictures - the app constantly sees and thinks. It knows several hundred objects right off but can also learn new objects.





# #HenshawsLifeHacks

These tips, tricks and tech are just a taste of how you can adapt your life to limit the impact of a visual impairment. We can support you in all of them and much more.

Through our Pathway to Independence programme, we tailor-make a bespoke package of support, activities and training which meet the needs of each person, from iPad training and cookery skills to social and hobby groups.

Our three centres in Manchester, Liverpool and Newcastle offer a range of services to provide visually impaired people with an improved quality of life.

**Get in touch and start your journey to go beyond expectations...**

## **First Step Team**

0161 872 1234

[info@henshaws.org.uk](mailto:info@henshaws.org.uk)

[henshaws.org.uk](http://henshaws.org.uk)

Atherton House, 88-92 Talbot Road,  
Old Trafford, Manchester, M16 0GS

