



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



Family & Community Services
Ageing, Disability & Home Care

Consumer Factsheet

How can colours support movement of people with ageing eyes or impaired sight?

PEER
REVIEWED

This factsheet explains how colours can be used to assist people with ageing eyes or impaired sight, to move safely and independently around their home. Colours can help you with recognising objects, sharing your thoughts with others, finding your way, and improving your mood.

Why is colour important for ageing eyes or impaired sight?

As a person's eyes age, the lens and cornea may deteriorate. Denser lenses and ageing corneas may result in blurry or partially blocked vision. Impaired vision can also be due to eye damage from an accident, trauma, tumour, stroke or genetics.

Ageing eyes and impaired sight can reduce the ability to recognise visual details or small objects. These details and small objects help people know where they are. When they know where they are, they no longer need so much help from other people.

Certain colour combinations can help with this too. These colour combinations can be different for those for people with 'normal' sight.

Colours also help improve feelings – some colours are known to help people with ageing eye or impaired sight.

What colours are good for ageing eyes or impaired sight?

There are no special colours that you need to choose. However, the following can help to make moving around inside and outside your home easier.

- Choose bright colours. Objects that are brightly coloured assist people with ageing eyes or impaired sight to locate them in a room or space.
- Mark an object, or its parts, with a certain colour. Marking objects can help people with ageing eyes or impaired sight to see and remember their location and their function. For example, choose a common colour for all the kitchen utensils, or mark the parts most often used - the on/off switch of the TV or remote control.
- Highly contrasting colours can highlight building features, such as doors and stairs, furniture, tools and fixtures. Highly contrasting colours can be used to mark objects that are blocking the way or cause falls, such as changes in floor level, or glass walls and doors that look like an opening. An example of high colour contrast for safety, is yellow or white step edges on dark-grey stairs. This allows people with impaired sight to see the stairs and work out how deep and wide the steps are.
- The smaller or narrower a feature, the higher the contrast between it and its surrounds should be. High colour contrast can be achieved by using bright or light colours such as white or yellow against darker colours such as dark red, grey, or black.

Make sure you like the colours you have chosen. Bright colours will help you see everything more easily and can also make you feel better.

Conclusion

Bright or highly contrasting colours as well as colour coding assist people with ageing eyes or impaired sight to identify a variety of objects in their home as well as help them with directions and avoiding hazards.

People with ageing eyes or impaired sight may also improve their positive feelings by using certain colours in their rooms.

Colour Application Checklist

Look around your home and work out which things you need to see more easily.

This checklist will help you work out how you can make your home easier for you to get around in and do things for yourself, if you have vision impairment or your eyes are ageing.

Ask someone to help you do this checklist if you need to!

Do you have bright or highly contrasting colours on features of your home or home products that need your attention, such as stairs, door handles, water taps and light switches, and controls on appliances?

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If not, can you mark them with different colours to distinguish them?

Do the features supporting your safety at home, such as handrails/ grab rails, step edges, fire extinguisher and telephone, use bright or highly contrasting colours against their backgrounds?

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If not, can you mark them with different colours to distinguish them?

Is your home entrance and front door easily recognisable when coming home and for your visitors?

What would help to make your home 'stand out' more easily for you? You could paint the door a bright colour or have some special features in the garden or along the path to help you know which is your house.

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If there are glass doors or large windows in your home, are there coloured markings on them so you don't walk into a window or closed door?

Get someone to help you put some markers, coloured stickers or even duct tape on them to help.

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Are your bathroom and kitchen floors of a colour that makes it easy for you to see when things are spilled on them or if something has fallen there (such as dirt, flour, or body powder or lotion)?

If the floors need replacing, make sure that next time, they are colours that will help you see things on them. Make sure now that lots of the items in the rooms are in your preferred colours- even if at the moment the floor can't be.

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Are often used small tools (such as kitchen utensils, cutlery, pens and keys), and small electronic products (such as a telephone or mobile phone) brightly coloured or in colours highly contrasting with their location?

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If not, can you mark them with different colours to distinguish them?

Are your foods, drinks, medicines or cosmetics at your home marked with different colours so you know which is which?



If not, can you mark them with different colours or a symbol to distinguish them?

Are your favourite colours being used in your rooms, furniture, fixtures or appliances to make you feel better?



Next time you are buying anything or are doing any colour changes, make sure you feel happy with the colours you have chosen.

These things can make getting around your home easier if you have vision impairment or your eyes are ageing and you are beginning to find it difficult to see detail clearly.

Where can I find more information?

- The HMinfo *Evidence Based Practice Review: Use of Colour for Safe Movement 2nd ed.*, available from www.homemods.info
- Australian Standards:
AS 1428.1-2009: Design for access and mobility - General requirements for access - New building work, and
AS 1428.4.1-2009: Design for Access and Mobility: Means to assist the orientation of people with vision impairment-Tactile ground surface indicators
- *National Construction Code Series 2016*, available from www.abcb.gov.au
- Other home modification resources on the www.homemods.info website

***This information was correct at time of printing.*