

Why it is more difficult to magnify when out and about and when watching television.

“With my magnifiers I can read really small print. I need some glasses that magnify like that to wear when I am out, so that I will be able to recognise my friends and see signs and bus numbers.”

“I need some magnifying spectacles for the television. I can see it if I sit really close, but I don’t want to damage my eyes.”

Simple hand and stand magnifiers or powerful lenses mounted in spectacles can only be used for magnifying close objects. Magnifying objects further away requires a more complex system of two or more lenses, like binoculars or telescopes. Low vision telescopes are usually just a few centimetres in length. Frequently they are hand-held, although sometimes they can be mounted in glasses, generally right at the top of the lens so they are out of the way when walking about. By lowering the chin the telescope can quickly be brought into use when required. Small pairs of binoculars are also useful. It is not possible to walk around safely while looking through any type of distance magnifier for the following reasons: Firstly, because distant objects are magnified they appear to be much closer than they really are, so distances can not be accurately judged. Secondly, close objects and things to

the side are hidden from view completely so can easily be tripped over.

Distance magnifiers in the form of binoculars and telescopes can be used for viewing departure boards at stations and airports, looking at numbers of stationary buses, watching sport and theatre, bird-watching and numerous other purposes. Visually impaired bowls players sometimes find them useful for their sport. Unfortunately they are not usually much use for viewing moving targets such as buses; the bus is likely to go sailing past while the user is still trying to focus on its number!

Binoculars and distance telescopes are also generally unsuitable for comfortable television viewing. They are often focussed too far away, and are frequently too high in power, meaning that only a small part of the screen can be seen at a time. Also holding a telescope or binoculars up to the eyes for long periods would be tiring and uncomfortable. Various aids are described as, “Television Glasses” or “Screen Magnifiers.” Television glasses are generally spectacle-mounted low-power telescopes which require a certain degree of dexterity in order to focus them. Screen magnifiers are large flat magnifiers which are placed in front of the television, producing a slightly enlarged picture which can sometimes be a little distorted. Although all these aids can occasionally be helpful, they

magnify only a small amount and rarely provide sufficient improvement for anyone with a significant visual impairment.

Buying a television with a larger screen can certainly help, but by far the most comfortable and effective way for most visually impaired people to magnify the television is simply to move closer to it, within a couple of feet or even closer if necessary. For very close viewing distances, reading glasses may be better than the distance glasses previously used for television. Fairly large adjustments to the colour and contrast balance can sometimes make a significant improvement.

Two final points while on the subject of television:

Firstly, it is never a good idea to place a lamp on or close to the television, as this will produce glare which will reduce contrast as well as being uncomfortable.

And secondly, contrary to popular belief, viewing the television from a really close distance will not harm the eyes in any way at all.