

LowVision ALERT

by Joyce Render Cohen and Evelyn Render Katz, OTR/L

Shopping with low vision

Whether you consider shopping a pleasure or a pain, low vision can impact the way you do it. I know, because my vision loss has changed my strategy.

I have to budget my energy as well as my money, so I do my homework first. I use the Internet and the telephone to find where I can get what I want for the best price. Sometimes it's easiest to buy on the Internet or the phone. Sales clerks are usually very helpful when they learn I have a disability. Even discount stores have offered to check inventory and sizes for me.

The best way for me to shop in stores is to take someone with me to be my eyes. While it's difficult being dependent on someone else, it can be fun to shop together.

Here are my tips for making shopping easier.

For all shopping:

- Take a shopping list, and a magnifier and flashlight to read price tags and labels.

Whether it's for socks, a new stove, or a bag of cat food, shopping is part of life. Here are some ideas to help when vision is on the fritz.

- Go to stores where you know the layout. Shelves and racks can be like a maze and it's easy to get disoriented with decreased vision.

- Patronize locally owned stores for personalized service and a more manageable selection.

- Try a pair of sports glasses, binoculars or a mini-telescope for spotting and reading signs at a distance.

- Wear colored glasses to reduce glare or improve contrast. (Try out light amber, medium yellow, light plum, or other tints to see what works best for you.)

For clothes shopping:

- Look for things that can be worn all year long.

- Choose easy care, washable fabrics in subtle prints and patterns to help disguise stains.

- Choose pieces to mix and match so that they can be used to make several outfits.

- To match colors, use a high-tech solution—a hand-held color matching machine—or natural daylight, or ask for help!

For groceries:

- Make a shopping list of generally purchased items at specific stores. Photocopy it and simply check off items as they need to be refilled.
- Ask for help. Many grocery stores provide assistance for people with disabilities.
- Shop during off-peak hours. It's easier to get around and get help if needed.
- In the summer, frequent the farmers' market, which has a great selection of produce and daylight to see it by.
- In other seasons, get to know people in the meat and produce departments who can help you make your selections.
- Let family or friends shop for you. Make out a complete list including alternate selections, desired sizes and quantities.
- Investigate local food delivery services.
- In many areas, you can buy groceries online.

For appliances:

- Consult **Consumer Reports** for ratings and energy use. (It's available online as well as at your newsstand.)
- Look for high contrast, bold

or large print on appliance controls. Choose ones with controls that don't have a lot of visual clutter and can be marked with raised paint or stick-on bumps as needed.

- Choose a stove with oven controls in the front so you never have to reach over a hot burner.
- Avoid controls with digital readouts or complicated functions you won't use. Simple is better.

Don't let vision loss deprive you of the enjoyment of exploring stores, shopping malls, boutiques, factory outlets ... make plans and get going!

Products suggested in this column can be found in the **Aids for Independent Living** catalog (800-537-2118 or **independentliving.com**) and in the **Maxi-Aids** catalog (800-522-6994 or **maxiaids.com**).

Joyce Render Cohen and her sister Evelyn Render Katz often team up to teach people with low vision ways to cope. Joyce has been living with MS for more than two decades. Evelyn is a registered occupational therapist in private practice.

Do you have shopping tips you'd like to share? 📧 editor@nmss.org.