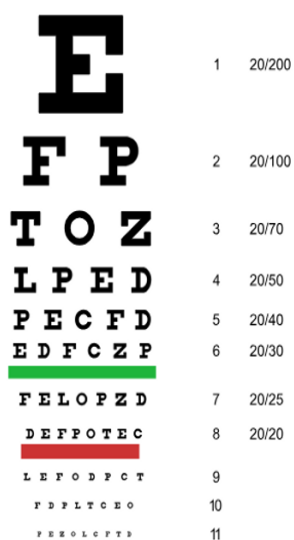


How-to-Blind Series

Part I

What is blind?

I don't know what you think or thought blindness was. I had this misconception that if a person was blind that they saw nothing but black. I knew people could be legally blind, but I didn't really have a concept to what that was. I wasn't completely oblivious to visual impairment; I just didn't understand. My mom had super thick "coke bottle" glasses her whole life. She would tell me that without her glasses she was legally blind.



Blindness comes in a couple of distinct categories of severity, according to the Industries for the blind and Visually Impaired.

- Partial sight – in either or both eyes
- Low vision – visual acuity is 20/70 or worse in the better eye AND cannot improve with glasses or contacts
- Legally blind – visual acuity is 20/200 or worse OR field of vision is 20 degrees or less in better eye and cannot be corrected or improved with glasses
- Totally blind – complete loss of sight (note this does not mean black, it's a misconception)

In 2015, according to WHO, 253 million people, worldwide, had a visual impairment. 36 million of the total were blind while the rest were moderately to severely visually impaired. That means about 14% of the VI population is blind.

My Blind...

I was born with extra fantastic sight. I had better than average sight and could see incredibly well at night. This was handy because I relied on my sight for almost everything in my life. I'm a visual learner, I enjoy reading, art, reading/playing music, hunting, playing pool, driving to travel and for fun, and so many more things that are heavily sight dependent.

Over the course of a year, I was subjected to many pan-retinal laser surgeries. These surgeries are designed to burn/kill parts of the retina to prevent those parts from bleeding. The retina is the part of the eye that accepts and translates light and light perception. It's the part of the eye that causes the famous "red eye" in photographs with flash because as the light flashes it reflects the retina; which is red.

After several of these surgeries, I needed to undergo a vitrectomy; the removal of the vitreous. The repeated surgeries caused cataracts on both lenses as well and as of today I've undergone one cataract surgery to replace the lens in my right eye.

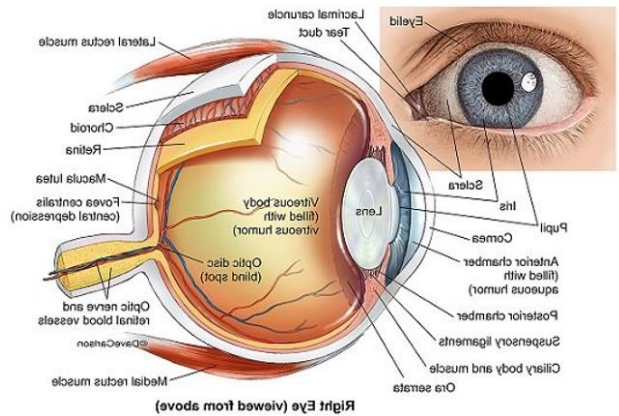
What does all that mean?

My left eye has been so damaged that it only receives light perception from a small portion of the field of vision; specifically, a small pizza slice on the outside edge. My right eye has more visual acuity but a ridiculously small field of vision; which is not in one area but spread over the retina in various patches. I am legally blind. I have light sensitivity and become completely blind in too much or too little light. So, in a room in a home with the curtains closed and one lamp on, I can read almost the same as a normal person, but it takes me a while because I have to scan back and forth and up and down until I catch the whole picture. If it is a sunny day and someone opened the curtains, in that room, I would have eye pain and more difficulty seeing. I might be completely unable to see, depending on how much light came through the windows. Similarly, if someone shut the light off and put a night light on, I would see nothing. I might be able to tell you where the night light is, but it would depend how bright the night light is.

Perception of light is a big deal, but particularly important in understanding what blindness is. If a person has no sight perception, they do not see black because black is dark. It's a super strange concept, I know. The closest I could come to actually explaining it is to call it a grey color. It's a void. Without light or perception your brain doesn't know what is there or supposed to be there, it's blank... it is void. It is not black. With my right eye I can see black while my left eye sees 99% void. That's right, just void, it is not black. It might be easier to think of blind people totally in the dark or in total blackness. It isn't accurate. They don't perceive light or dark. They perceive void.

Is every blind the same?

Absolutely not. There are many eye disorders and injuries that might lead to different possible visual impairments. The eye is full of parts that can go haywire: optic nerve, cornea, retina, lens, vitreous, etc. Some of these parts can be replaced, such as the cornea and lens. Some things, though, just can't be fixed, like the retina or optic nerve.



Some people have tunnel vision (just vision in the center), others have only peripheral vision. Some people have high light requirements while other people have light sensitivity. Some people have foggy vision while others only have light perception. There are so many varieties of blind/VI that to try to lump everyone together wouldn't make any sense.

How does this work?

That's the whole point of this series. I was fully sighted. I know what black looks like and what it isn't. It isn't so long ago that I had my full vision. I remember what the world did look like. I want to be a translator between the sighted and the not so sighted. I want to open the doors and windows to my life and how I've learned to cope with this blind thing so that others can learn to do the same, but also so that sighted people can see inside to know what it is... to know how to blind.

I will try to go through everyday basic things as well as more complicated things so that it's easier to understand for everyone. I will answer questions that I've had numerous times, but if you have questions just comment or mail me and I'll make sure to include those as well. I have several friends with various VI's that I will endeavor to introduce and gain perspective from because knowing how-to-blind is also not universal.

Ready? Let's go!

Part 2

Home/Basic Setup/Living

Everyone needs a place that's relaxing, safe, a place to unwind. The home should be a place where those who live there are in comfort and everyone's version of comfort varies. The same is true for VI/Blind people. I read an article, once, talking about how the home needed to be very bright/well-lit for a blind person. Wrong. My blind is not your blind. There are some common things that most VI/blind folks will want the same but other things need to be tailored.

Common things:

- Keep walkways clear – this seems like common sense, but really, all walkways clear all the time and don't just leave something there "for a minute". We probably won't see it and you can cause injury this way. We don't see toys, dog bones, random shoes, a box to go out, etc.
- Discuss before moving communal objects – we may or may not see where you put said item. It could be that it takes us an exceedingly long time to find what we're looking for, if you moved it. Also, though, it can become a health hazard.

In my home, we put knives in the drawer with the sharp side toward the back and right of the drawer. If someone turns it around, I will cut myself. Some chemicals look the same and can be easily confused.

- Do not ever move our personal things – it is not and will never be helpful for a seeing person to reorganize a blind person's things. We have them where we have them because it is comfortable for us. Stop, do not do it, ever, for any reason.
- Strong contrasting light environments are difficult for our eyes/brains to process
- The direction of light sources matters and should be tailored for the people living in the home as well as the VI/blind person.
- Uneven surfaces are unsafe and difficult to maneuver
- Tight spaces are difficult to navigate
- Hazardous items mixed with non-hazardous items is unsafe

For the light sensitive:

- Keep at least one space darker- light sensitive people can't handle light. It makes us tired and often gives pain.
- White walls can reflect the light and can better be grey or tan
- Reflective surfaces/bright lights/flashing lights are painful and can take a long time to recover from

For the dark sensitive:

- Keep at least one space bright- dark sensitive people struggle with the ability to see in darker areas. Their vision is clearer and better with more light.
- Warm colors and cozy rooms can mean less vision and thus make a dark sensitive person more tired trying to process with little light.

What does that mean?

Everyone who lives in the home is important and their comfort is important. Safety is also especially important. It is very possible to create a home environment that is both safe and comfortable for all occupants, maybe just with some modifications. In the next few segments, I will go over lighting, colors, and other basic home setup topics that will be particularly useful to creating the environment that the whole household will appreciate.

Lighting: It's a thing

I'll give some examples. I can't handle bright light sources. I need diffused and indirect lighting. Diffused lighting simply means the light source is filtered through something like a lamp shade or curtains. Indirect lighting means that the light source is focused

away. So, my home has both types of light sources, darker colored walls, and two types of shading over the windows.

Here's an example of diffused lighting:

Diffused lighting simply means the light source is filtered through something like a lamp shade or curtains.



Here's an example of indirect lighting:

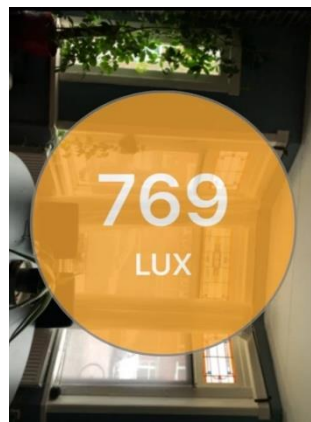
Indirect lighting means that the light source is focused away. This photograph shows diverse types of indirect lighting and a diffused orb lamp. None of the light is directed toward the person or their eye level.



This is my living room window curtains closed and then with the lux count.



This is the same time same window curtains open and then with the lux count.



If you notice, the curtains are open, but I still have sun filtering shades. I don't think I'm capable of actually putting those up and staying in the room long enough to show you the difference. My comfort zone is around 30-80 lux. I can be in up to 300 lux but not for a super long period of time, maybe an hour or so before I get a headache and tired. Above 300 lux and I am totally blind, in pain both with the eyes and the head and exhausted very quickly.

Here's a lux chart that might give you perspective on how much light is normal in certain areas.

Illumination condition	Illuminance
Full moon	1 lux
Street lighting	10 lux
Home lighting	30 to 300 lux
Office desk lighting	100 to 1,000 lux
Surgery lighting	10,000 lux
Direct sunlight	100,000 lux

What if a seeing person lives in the same house?

In most cases, the seeing person can use small personally directed lighting for their own needs. It is possible to have natural light within the home without it being overbearing. Also, in the same way that the blind person needs that one safe and comfy space, the seeing people need the same. Perhaps, the sighted person can have their own personal space for crafting/reading/being.

What if the blind person is dark sensitive?

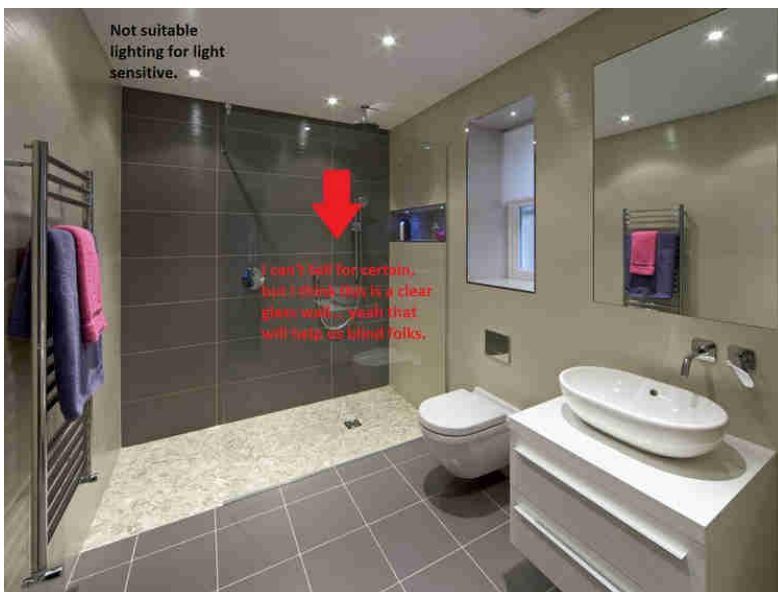
In a later segment, I will have actual photos and lux readings from a home of a dark sensitive person so that you can get an idea of what that setup would be like.

Blind-friendly Bathrooms: Safety First (but we're not toddlers)

In searching for a picture of a bathroom suited for a VI/Blind I came right smack into the wrong things. I was shocked at what people thought would be great and accessible for a VI/Blind.



Those arrows point at things that, after zooming in super close, are completely unnecessary. They're just decorative. They're all breakable and collect dust. Big red nope. This one has no storage for bathroom products, period. Items are put on shelves, easily broken.



This is, also, an incredible amount of no. I'm pretty sure that's a shower wall that's glass. I can't tell still after zooming, but if it is, that's a bad bad plan. There's no storage in the shower other than a small shelf, with bright lights: not suitable for light sensitive. The lighting cannot be focused to the task, is bright and direct. Some VI/Blind people can see in a mirror, I'm not sure why we would need two?

Right after I lost my vision, several people questioned my ability to function safely. I was perplexed. I've spent my whole life functioning on the sketchy side of safe; why is now a problem? The day I came home from the 2nd surgery, with patches on my eyes, I made my mom's lasagna from scratch. How hard could this really be? We're going to explore it, but first a true story.

I had asked for and received household help with cleaning because my blindness made it more difficult at the beginning. My regular guy was on vacation, so the agency sent a new lady. I told her that I really only needed her to clean the toilet/wc, vacuum, and maybe do a few dishes. I was busy doing rehabilitation online, with a headset. I had no idea what she was actually doing. She came down and laid a pile of things on the desk and told me they needed sorted. I ended my class quickly and asked her what this was. She told me she helped me by reorganizing my bathroom. She took a bag of trash down from the shower room and left it on a chair. I asked her why she had done it and she told me "It needed cleaned, and your things were not organized."

My things had been organized the same way since before I lost my vision: my things on one side, the other person's things on the other side, and cleaning materials safely away from both sets of personal hygiene sections. As I blindly fumbled around the shower room, I had no idea what anything was. She hadn't even cleaned, she had just reorganized things. Suddenly, shampoo bottles that I knew were shampoo bottles, I couldn't tell because they were mixed in with hazardous chemicals for cleaning. My things mixed with the other person's things. I started crying. I was mortified.

After checking for items and a seeing person browsing the garbage bag she had unceremoniously left on a chair, we found that she had thrown away my make-up, an inherited perfume bottle, and some of my eye medications. She threw away a foldable cloths bin that was borrowed to us and emptied the box of cat litter on it all so that nothing was salvageable.

A supervisor came over early the next day and walked through literally every item while I had to explain what went where. The supervisor, of course, was horrified this had happened; not as horrified as me. I spent a whole day crying over it. It seems silly, maybe, to a seeing person. In that moment, though, I understood why people were concerned about my functioning on the safe side. All of a sudden, I couldn't tell you if a bottle was bleach or my expensive face wash. Obviously, some containers were so unique that a person can easily identify them, but when most of what you thought were identifiable are suddenly elsewhere, it's confusing and scary.

How do we make it safe and functional?

Let's start with some basics:

- Everyone is different and how they want things organized should be considered
- Refer to the part where I said NEVER REORGANIZE THE PERSONAL ITEMS OF A BLIND PERSON
- Include the VI/Blind person in how things should be organized or rearranged if they aren't currently safe or suitable for the VI/Blind person.
- It's not good to mix personal items with cleaning items. If they were already that way, consider coming up with a plan to adjust that
- Make labels for things not often used or that can easily be confused. Labels? What? Yeah, you can get a braille label press that will allow you to label items in braille. You could also get raised stickers so that certain items have maybe 2 raised stickers, etc. Just a way to identify the confusing items.
- Make a "stock" items system that allows for FIFO (first in first out). In other words, new products should be put behind older products so that you don't risk things going out of date.
- Expiration dates can either be labeled on the item or put into a spreadsheet on the computer so the VI/Blind person can access it. Wait what? (Yeah, we'll get to how blind people use computers just as well if not better than seeing people)
- Containers that are similar to basic everyday use items should be avoided or clearly marked. Toothpaste has a familiar tube, but hernia cream, Benadryl and other things come in the SAME SHAPE, don't put them anywhere near the toothpaste. It's not funny, it's dangerous and humiliating.
- Some basic things can be super difficult for VI/Blind people: finding the start of the toilet roll, knowing when certain things are low if the VI/Blind person doesn't physically use those items, knowing that things are unclean.

This is an example of an easy storage system that is very handy for a VI/Blind person. There are different levels for various products. There are spaces to safely store a razor. Water can drain from the levels and it's easy to clean.



This is an example of cubes you could purchase to help keep your stock of bathroom items organized. I think this set is from The Container Store. I'm too blind to see what is in the cubes, but you would want to make sure that you place hazardous items away from non-hazardous. You would want to keep similar shaped bottles away from each other unless each bottle is labeled.

How can you help?

Every VI/Blind is different, ask the person what they struggle with in certain household aspects. I get irritated with trying to open toilet roll. I have no idea if someone else's shampoo is getting low, they have to tell me. I don't want to and am not going to go around picking up every item to try to determine what might feel light enough that I should order more. In general, seeing people can easily make a comment about what's low in inventory, add it to a communal list, or just refill it themselves.

I, personally, don't struggle with getting toothpaste on the toothbrush or putting make-up on, or cutting my toenails. These kinds of things can be difficult for a VI/Blind, though and if you want to help just ask. A VI/Blind might struggle with things that are eye-level obstacles: such as hooks at eye level, hangers that stick out, etc. If you, as a seeing person, can tell that you would walk into something if you had your eyes closed, then your VI/Blind buddy is likely to do the same.

Rugs are another topic that has varied results for VI/Blind. I like rugs. Others find them a nuisance. Other people trip over them or slip on them. It's a decision you need to discuss because it's a safety issue. Lighting, too, as mentioned in the previous segment is a big deal. In homes where more than one person lives, you'll want lighting that's adjustable. I can shower in the dark, but someone else might want bright light to put on make-up or shave. Lighting that suits everyone is possible. For light sensitive Blinds, use indirect lighting or light that can be focused. Better yet, get two kinds of light that are on different switches. There are easy solutions to just about every situation.

Clean the toilet. I'm not kidding. I don't know a single VI/Blind person that feels comfortable doing it. We can't see it and it's gross. You can see it and make it less gross for yourself. We can clean that's not necessarily a thing. It takes us longer because we don't see it, so we have to do method cleaning: centimeter by centimeter until the whole surface is done so that we don't miss anything.



What does this all mean?

VI/Blind people can continue to exist, probably in a similar way as sighted people. There just might be some issues that need to be resolved to make it a little more convenient and safer. It's a good idea to treat us like adults, if we are an adult, because we're not toddlers, we have a seeing problem. Our sighted cohabitants don't need to go out of their way to adjust to us, but some basic things might help and make the whole environment better for everyone.

Kitchens: Yes, they're already blind-friendly it's the users that often aren't.

There are a whole bunch of parts and pieces to a kitchen and some of them can be hazardous to just about anyone. I was already super comfortable in the kitchen and my kitchen has always been pretty organized, so adjusting to being blind wasn't really that difficult for me. THIS IS NOT TRUE OF EVERY VI/BLIND. I want to be clear about that. As mentioned previously, with both eyes covered by patches I made homemade lasagna from scratch. How? I'm that comfortable in the kitchen. Not everyone is that comfortable and the level of safety and precaution needs to be tailored for the person in question.

Let's start with the appliances:

Stoves:

- I use gas but many VI/Blind use electric to avoid catching themselves on fire. I can hear the level of the flame. Close your eyes and adjust your burner, you'll hear it too.
- Practicality means that the individual should not wear loose fitting items or long hair while cooking. These items can not only get into the food but also catch fire.
- Keeping items in the same places and keeping them a safe distance from the stove should ensure nothing catches on fire while cooking.
- It's always a good idea to keep fire extinguishers and smoke detectors in and around the kitchen to prevent/fix situations.

Refrigerator:

- There's nothing particularly different or interesting about a refrigerator in regard to VI/Blind other than it's important to make stable places for items so that they're easier to find for the non-seeing
- Keep meats on the lowest shelf and away from any prepared foods to prevent blood from dripping but also the non-seeing won't know if the blood did drip.
- Keep prepared foods in airtight containers so that they do not get contaminated by raw foods

- Organize the fridge so that the oldest is nearest the front and new things get put behinds so as to know that you're not using expired items.
- Apps like SeeingAI can help the non-seeing to read expiration dates

Ovens:

- Ovens can be tricky in that most of them use a temperature knob or buttons that make no sounds. This can get super difficult for someone who can't see
- If the oven has a temperature knob, a seeing person can make divots at each of the markers and a bump on the control line so that it's easy to line it up using tactile means.
- If the oven is digital and has no sound you could use SeeingAI to let you know what the temperature is
- Clean the oven regularly so that you don't risk burn flavor in things but also because you can't see it needs it, so just do it.

Fryers:

- Deep fat fryers are just a general no because they are so dangerous. Even if you use the basket and are super careful there is a substantial risk of getting hurt.
- Air fryers are a viable alternative for VI/Blind. While you won't get the super crispy treats anymore, you can still do fries and pre-frozen deep-fry items.

Coffee machines:

- Even the most technical machine can just be memorized, so don't be afraid to buy the super expensive espresso machine if you want it
- Most machines have stable buttons that can also be labeled
- My machine has flashing lights that I can't see. One is for dumping grounds and the other is for refilling water. I just refill the water and dump the grounds every morning. Problem solved. If it doesn't run as it should, that means it MUST be the clean me light flashing, so I run a cleaning cycle.
- If you have to fill a pitcher you can get heat sensitive audio indicators to tell you when it's full. These are super handy for filling coffee machines or carafes, even your own cup.

Mixers:

- I have and use a KitchenAid all the time for everything mixable. They're easy to use and have two levers/buttons. I genuinely suggest purchasing one or a similar item for all your mixing needs. The KitchenAid is stable,

strong, and made to be a workhorse. You can even purchase bowls with guards to prevent foodstuff from flying everywhere. This can be particularly handy for floury things.

- Stick blenders/mixer sets are also super handy and convenient for VI/Blind. Don't feel like chopping the onions? Toss them in the chopping part of a stick blender set and pulse 3 times. Done. Want to make salsa but can't be bothered to hand-cut all the ingredients? Rough cut them throw them in the chopping part, pulse 5 times: salsa. It can be used to puree things, whisk things, super handy and makes it quick.
- Hand mixers are also okay, but I tend not to use them because I have a KitchenAid but also because it can be difficult to hold a mixer, scrape the side of a bowl, and try to guess if things are mixed.

Dishwashers:

- Take the complicated out of the dishwasher by having a seeing person label the most common settings so that they're easy to find.
- If you want to be dependent (go on with your bad self) use an app like SeeingAI to read the settings to you and you mark them yourself.
- You still have to run your clean hands over every dish because you can't see if it's clean, but at least you didn't have to wash it!
- Set schedules for cleaning the filter and refilling the salt: you won't know when it needs done by sight so just make a schedule
- Set schedules for maintenance, you will want this machine to last a while

Waffle Irons/Toasters/ Toasty Makers/ Fajita Press:

- These small appliances all can produce heat and some of them can cause quite a burn if the VI/Blind is not paying attention
- Always place the item away from things that can catch fire or melt
- Don't overfill. How? Use a measuring cup with your waffle batter (I use $\frac{1}{2}$ C) so that you don't overfill. Don't stack your toasty to the sky, and if it's hard to get your bread in the toaster, it's too fat, better to hand toast it.
- Carefully take your machines apart and clean after every use.
- Do not keep these machines plugged in or on the counter when not in use
- If they have an indicator light and not a ding to tell you when it is done, look up the average time and set a timer on your phone. My waffle maker takes 4 min 15 seconds. I set a timer on the phone. Not an issue.

Now that we have most common appliances covered, let's talk about setup and management of the kitchen.

- Cleaning supplies: you'll want to have these in a place all to themselves. Make sure to label containers or just have a good memory as to where they are because some of these chemicals cannot be mixed, or they cause hazardous/fatal conditions
- Non-perishables should be kept in a closed system and newest things put at the back. What does closed system mean? No open containers as it invites bugs/rodents and VI/Blind cannot see if these items are contaminated. I keep my various flours in plastic containers with lids. Each of the containers is a different shape so that I know which flour I'm getting to. My sugars are in glass containers with metal lids. Spices are also in glass and metal containers. If you can't smell the difference of your spices, feel free to label them. I also place my Italian seasonings on one shelf of the spice rack, dessert based on another, Thai on yet another, Chinese on another, and so forth. Some spices are intercultural right? Yes, but if chervil is mainly used in French dishes, I keep it with the French spices and I know where to find it if I'm using it in a Vietnamese dish.



- Root vegetables can be kept together in a dark place. I typically can feel the difference between sweet potato, potato, beetroot, onion, garlic, etc. I, do, have little cubes that I put them in though.
- I also keep a vegetable/fruit cube system that's easy to clean for fruits and vegetables that should be kept in the open air.
- Refrigerated items have been glossed over already, but I'll just point out again that you need to keep raw meats on the lowest shelf to prevent contamination. Precooked items should be in a sealed container away from raw items. You can use a system of containers to know

which day you stored it.



Now we'll move to the non-food items.

- Knives should be stored either in a block, on a hanging wrack, or in a system that allows the VI/Blind to know exactly where the sharp part of the knife is and where it isn't.
- Utensils should be separated and not just forks/forks/ spoons/spoons. What do I mean? My set has salad forks, dinner forks, teaspoons, tablespoons, dessert forks, dessert spoons, serving

spoons, meat forks, butter knives, steak knives, jelly spoons etc. I have a divided system that allows for a slot for salad forks, a different slot for dinner forks and so on. I do keep the serving spoons and meat forks together, but everything else gets separated because I cannot easily and quickly see the way a sighted person does. If I want a dessert spoon, not only is it unhygienic to have to fondle everything in the drawer, but it's also time consuming; everything needs a home.

- I have little boxes for sets of things (yay Ikea.) For example, my whisks are all in one long box with my spatulas since their handles feel different but when I need a whisk, I often need a spatula.



(The scraping kind of spatula) I have another box for ladles and long handled utensils. Gone is the big drawer of mixed utensils because I can't see it and it would take forever to figure out where the item is that I need.

- I have dividers for almost every big drawer in my kitchen so that not only do I know where to find something, other people know where to return it. I have a spot for trivets, a different one for mitts, another yet for dish towels and another yet for rags. It might seem overkill and I am OCD, but it saves so much time for me to not have to try to identify if I've grabbed a rag or a dishtowel.
- Try to keep items together and near where they will be used. In my kitchen I have a separate cupboard that is home to the KitchenAid, oven, and Microwave. It has three drawers and 6 shelves. Everything in those drawers is associated with baking or food storage. The cupboards above my coffee machine involve my coffee and teacups along with the teas and hot beverage items. I follow the previously mentioned systems of putting stock with newest at the back oldest at the front.

- While I do use regular coffee mugs and teacups, I've transitioned to non-breakable drinking cups. It's a fact of life that even if I "know" where I placed something, I don't see it and I knock it over. I broke all but 1 of the glasses. I kept that 1 glass in the China cabinet for posterity.
- I've broken most of the coffee mugs too, have basically a whole new set but I'm not a fan of the idea of using plastic with hot beverages and my one attempt with metal left me burned.
- I clean the trashcan every single week. I can't see the gross, but you know it exists. Also, VI/Blind are highly tactile, I touch things as I walk past just to make sure of where I am; it needs cleaned.
- It's a good idea to wipe down all surfaces not only after cooking but weekly cleans of all appliances. You don't see it. I know it's confronting but it doesn't mean it doesn't exist because you don't see it. My logic: every time I wipe something down, I get some of the dirt, if I missed something, I'll probably get it when I wipe down again. Clean often.
- I haven't seen a garbage disposal, where I live, but I did have one in the states. I'm not sure how I feel about it VI/Blind. You would need to stick your hand in every single time before use to make sure nothing was in the disposal that shouldn't be. This is really unsafe and a quick way to lose a hand. I think I would skip it if I had the option.

What does this all mean?

This was quite a bit of information to process, and it isn't even all of it. I've lived blind for 2 years, now. I don't always think of all the little things that I do differently or why I do them differently. So, I will try to write updates as they come up because as comprehensive as I try to be, there will always be things I miss.

We will dive into other areas of the home in the next segment. I think it's important to remember, as you read this, that VI/Blind are not stupid nor are we toddlers. You don't have to kid proof a home. You don't need to blind-proof a home. The topic headline was about users for a reason. My biggest problem in my kitchen is when someone else puts something away in the wrong place and places me in a hazardous or unsafe position. Designated spaces for dirty dishes, for food items, for utensils, etc. are important so that the VI/Blind doesn't break things, hurt themselves, or regularly get confronted with their blind. I know I'm blind, I don't need to knock glasses from the counter and have to apologies because I didn't see it.

Home-Office Spaces: More important to make blind-friendly than the living room? Maybe!



When I'm playing World of Warcraft and I tell people I'm playing with that I'm blind, I get a wide variety of responses. Some people think I'm joking or lying. Other people immediately respond with something trying to qualify the level of my visual impairment. There is never a response of immediate acceptance and understanding of the fact. Why? World of Warcraft is a highly visual game that's played on a computer and how

could I do that if I'm blind?

It might surprise some that one of my most used spaces is my home-office. It's essential for so much of my life that I would really struggle if it wasn't tailored for me. My home-office is the place where I not only find leisure (gaming and reading), but also do home administration (ordering groceries, reading mail, paying bills). I can't just read my own mail. I need to either use a VI/Blind tool for enlarging/readback or I need to scan it and read it with my braille display. Going to the grocery is difficult because I cannot choose my purchases by sight, I need to touch things. It is far easier for me to order my groceries online or on my phone. All of the things that I do are only possible because the space is made for me and my visual impairment.

It's important to note: every blind is different and tailoring the space is dependent on the needs

Common things:

- The Vi/Blind desk should not be reorganized/adjusted without consultation to the person involved
- All cords/cables should be tucked away and secured
- Purchase products that reduce blind accidents
 - Cupholders in the desk to avoid spills, or always use bottles with lids
 - Guarded shelves to avoid knocking things over
 - Surge protectors with large off buttons
 - Drawers/dividers/spaces for all things
- Lighting should like the activity, not the space and should be tailored to the light sensitivity level

- The desk and chair should be suitable for all of the VI/Blind needs (maybe two monitors, scanner, voice over camera, space for regular and braille keyboard, speaker and headset dual combo)
- Adequate space for movement

Light sensitivity things:

- Dark walls, furniture, and curtains
- Ambient lighting reduced with limited chance for bright contrasting lights
- All screens adjusted for lower lighting or turned away from the space the VI/Blind needs

Dark sensitivity things:

- No dark spaces or high contrast bright/dark spaces
- Avoid inconsistent ambient lighting



Every VI/Blind person is different in their needs and tools. I will go over what my setup is, but it's very important to understand that each VI/Blind will need to customize their setup!

Monitors:

I have two large monitors. Why do I need a monitor if I'm VI/Blind? There are many reasons for a blind person to have a monitor or monitors with the most obvious being that if someone needs to help them fix a problem the person most likely needs to actually see what they're doing. As I mentioned previously, the vast majority of VI/Blind have some perception. I, personally, choose to do certain things visually. It takes a lot of my energy and makes me tired if I use my eyes, but sometimes I want to and when I do, I want it to be easy and comfortable.

My screens and settings are all set to high-contrast dark mode. Everything is black background with non-white lettering. I do not utilize bright pictures or animations because it's painful and the light level coming off of the monitor doesn't need to be to a level to stress me out.

Keyboard & Mouse:

I use a gaming keyboard and mouse. They both have inset lighting. My keyboard has rainbow lighting, and my mouse has pink (I think) lighting. Both are subtle and do not irritate me. I prefer to have lit components because it's easier for me to find them. I like the gaming keyboard and mouse because they have extra buttons; which allow me to set macros to speed things up. For example, my keyboard has volume controls for my sound. This is so much easier to control than pawing around my desk looking for my volume knob or tabbing through my desktop to get to the volume controls. My mouse has 12 buttons on the side; which can be set to 12 different commands. In gaming, it's set for the skills/spells I use.



I, also, utilize a braille display/keyboard. I use the Focus 40 by Freedom Scientific. I rarely type out in braille, but sometimes I do for fun. Most of the time, I read in braille because it's much faster than listening to a voice over. My desk has the space to hold both keyboards at the same time. The braille display is also easier for navigating, so I tend to just keep it connected.

PC:

My pc is a relatively high-powered system because it needs to run JAWS/Fusion along with all of the other stuff I run. While I'm writing this, I have JAWS running, Spotify, Chrome, Word, Notepad, Battlenet, and explorer open. It's usually even more running. My pc needs to handle it. My pc is also lit, and I usually have it set to rainbow or blue. It's non-irritating lighting and, for me, it provides a nice atmosphere. My pc is protected under the desk so that if I do have a blind girl accident, it's safe from liquids/spills/etc.

Enlarging Screen/Reader:

I'm not sure what the technical term is for the device, because I only learned what it was in Dutch. It is a machine with a monitor and a tray below the monitor, which is movable, in all directions. The machine has a camera behind the monitor. When turned on, the machine will not only enlarge what the camera picks up (and is customizable to individual needs) it also recognizes text and reads it to me. This is a large machine and takes up as much space as my computer.

Scanner/Printer:

I have a cannon all-in-one scanner/printer because it suits all my needs, but also, it's wireless. I can connect to it with my phone as easily as I can my computer.

Lighting:

I utilize no additional lighting when I'm in the office alone. If someone is in the office with me, they often turn on the overhead light. I keep my blackout curtains closed and the lights off and am a happy little blind girl. Everyone is different and might prefer different lighting.

File Cabinet: Wait what?

Yep, I still need to keep "hard copies" or originals of things the same as you. With the aid of braille labels, I use a file system. I label the hanging files and the manilla folders inside the hanging files and I make sure to put the oldest item in the back of the manilla folder. If something is particularly important, I'll add something to it to easily find it such as a flag sticker.

Pens/Scissors:

I, still need to sign, open, mark up documents. I use the enlarging screen to be able to mark/sign things. I keep pens/pencils/scissors in a cup on my desk. Extras and backups are kept in original packaging in the top drawer of my file cabinet.

Medication:

Looking at a screen can be difficult on the VI/Blind. I keep eyedrops at the desk. Yes, I could just go to the normal medicine drawer to get them, but considering I use eyedrops regularly, it's more convenient to keep them on the desk. It's good to have a spot just for eyedrops/creams.

Sound:

I have a gaming headset with mic, camera, and a 5-speaker setup. It's possible to adjust which apparatus plays from which application. JAWS is something I need to hear but the whole world doesn't. It is set to always be in my headset. Meanwhile, I regularly have Spotify set to the speakers in case others want to share in the music. You can also adjust the volume of each app within the specified device. JAWS is always on, but it's set to 10% because I don't need it to be louder than everything.



Tactile things...

Let's talk about tactile things. VI/Blind people tend to touch things more than sighted people. I, personally, think it's nice if the things I touch feel nice. I try to make sure my desk is always clean and dusted so that when I do touch it, my fingers don't get gross. My blackout curtains are a nice fabric that's soft to the touch. My mouse isn't just a gaming mouse, it's super comfy to hold. I have a mousepad that is non-irritating to my hands. I wallpapered my walls with brick wallpaper because the wallpaper looks cool, but also when I touch the walls to find my location, it feels nice.

Crafty places: Yes, blind people need them, too.



Writing a section about setting up a craft place is difficult because everyone has diverse types of crafts they enjoy doing. Some crafts require a lot of cleanup and maybe would be better sorted in an outdoor space, like a garage. Other crafts need lots of storage containers. This section will be to give you some basic ideas and examples so that you can set up your craft space in a way that's better for the VI/blind.

Lighting: As mentioned in about every other segment in the How-to-Blind series, lighting the activity is important. Creating smooth even lighting that is suited to the VI/blind need is equally as important. Some folks like to have a lamp that is movable to the area where the light needs to be focused.



Organization: It doesn't particularly matter how the items are arranged, just that they are. I use a huge IKEA cubicle with the big boxes. I have braille labels on the outside of the boxes so that I know what's in each one. Having a specific amount of storage also limits me from making new acquisitions of items that I simply do not have the room for it. When a project is finished, whatever space it was taking in the storage unit is free, and I can begin on a new project.



Smaller storage placed inside larger storage is another great way to keep things organized. I do many things involving knitting/crochet/sewing. I have one large box for tools pertaining to those crafts. Inside the large box are smaller containers which hold knitting needles, sewing needles, pins, crochet hooks, scissors, etc. If I'm looking for my button kit, it will be in a container for hand sewing, in the larger basic tools box.

Safe: You want to keep the area safe for the VI/Blind and that usually means not allowing others or animals into the area to rearrange things. Not let others in. What? I'm not kidding, when other people think they're just going to "tidy" something or "help" with something, they often misplace an item, and it can take the vi/blind a long time to search it. We are tactile, so, while we search, we will be touching many things and could put ourselves at risk.

It can be time consuming to set up the initial crafty place to suit the VI/blind. There will need to be much organization and braille label making. It is worth the time and effort though. Every time the vi/blind needs to find something they can easily do so without having to touch every single item they have or to rifle through a big container looking for one little thing.



Other areas of the home: pets, gardens, sheds etc.

This is our last segment in the home setup basics. You've probably started to notice a running theme throughout the segments. It doesn't really matter what the area of the home is, it needs to be lit in such a way as to be comfortable for the VI/blind and the rest of the occupants of the home. The area needs to be organized and tidy so that the VI/blind doesn't waste hours looking for items and risk their fingers being cut by finding the wrong things. Other areas of the home, outside of the basic topics, follow the same basic protocols.

Pet areas: There should be storage items containing basics for grooming the pets, feeding the pets, and cleaning the pet living space. I have a large container that holds slightly more than a 20kg bag of dog food. When it becomes low, I order more and the whole bag fits in the container. I have similar containers for cat food and bunny food. There is a dedicated spot for the clean/new litter, the scoop, and the collection bags. Each dog has their own bin with items for the dog in the bin including: leashes, collars, toys, chews, treats, etc. I have one bin dedicated to flea/worm treatments, nail clippers, brushes, and sprays. Some items are in smaller containers within the bigger container so that I don't lose them. Items relevant to the pet/pet area are kept near the pet/pet area.



Walking: Uneven surfaces are a very real pain for most vi/blind. It doesn't mean we can't have stairs or steps; it means that arbitrary places of unlevel flooring are hard for us to maneuver. We may or may not see cords across the walkway, etc. It's a good idea to ensure that all flooring and walking spaces are as level and even as possible. You can also put tactile bumps on the wall if there will be a step coming, to help the VI/blind be aware of how close they are to the step.

Doors: It seems pretty obvious that blind/vi people may or may not see doors that are ajar or closed. It isn't that obvious to the sighted people, though. I will never forget the day that I was in rehab and my braille teacher went to go get a tea. Someone had closed a door in the hallway, one which is never closed, and my teacher didn't see it. I heard a thunk and her whimper. She walked straight into a closed door. Cupboard and closet doors should always remain closed unless being used in that very moment. Discuss and make a plan as to which doors will always remain open and which doors will always remain closed within the home so as to avoid accidents.

My office door is default open. If it is closed, it's because of a meeting; in which case I'm already made aware it is closed. The bedroom door, too, is default open. The shower room door, conversely, is default closed. Being aware of which doors are default open and default closed saves quite a few accidents.



Gardens: I love my outdoor spaces. I do not love sunlight. My garden area is arranged so that seating is both in and out of the sun. It's important to make sure that the VI/blind always has a place that is dark and one that is not. It's also important that rules in the garden/patio follow the rules of the whole home. Don't leave things in the walkway, don't move furniture without warning, don't put sharp or unsafe things in different places.

Misc.: There are things that cannot be accounted for. Events will happen that will remind you like a slap in the face how blind you are. My cats have been hunting mice and bringing them home as gifts. Sometimes, I see

the mice, sometimes I do not. The other day I was making breakfast and a friend told me to move aside because he wanted to clean up a thing. I had

apparently walked past a dead mouse for the past 5 minutes without knowing it. Eventually my foot would have found it, or I would have found it vacuuming, but my eyes did not find it. It's embarrassing and it's confronting, but it is what it is. If you live with or are in the home of a vi/blind, it's a good idea to communicate when you notice something is awry.

Yes, it's embarrassing for someone to tell me something isn't clean or that I have a dead mouse on my kitchen floor. I'd rather know and be able to fix it than to have it remain that way. Each person is different, some people would rather just have the help silently, others would want to know, and others would rather not have any help. It's a good idea, nonetheless, to just communicate.



Important Note

Let's talk about ableism. The definition of ableism as described by the Merriam Webster dictionary is as follows: discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities. What does it mean in society? Ableism is the idea that disabled people are somehow less than non-disabled people. It can be obvious things; such as not complying with inclusion laws (not building ramps, not having accessible toilets etc.). It can be more subtle things, like trying to fix a disabled person or things around them.

There are a couple of good websites that cover the idea of it. It's a difficult concept but it's important because the home is the one place ableism should not exist. Ableism involves things like not having braille on signs or buttons, making fun of people with disabilities, segregating, or excluding disabled people, not making reasonable accommodation, or assuming people with disabilities don't have the same rights as others.

More common versions of ableism, though, are found in everyday life and they do not belong in the home of a VI/Blind. These things include: use of accessibility devices by anyone other than vi/blind (no, my blind stick is not something to search under the bed with), talking to a vi/blind (or any other disabled) like they're a child or they're unintelligent, questioning if the person is really disabled and if so, how much.

I shared a story, earlier, about a home help aid that entirely reorganized my things because she felt my organization wasn't good enough. That's a strong example

of ableism. People moving my blind stick because it was in their way, questioning my ability to be a parent, getting irritated because I ask for lights to be turned down are all examples of everyday ableism.

Asking me what happened, or what I do see, or if I'm comfortable talking about my impairment are all absolutely okay. Treating me like anybody else, is also okay. I know it seems like a bit of a paradox to say that I need accommodation but to treat me like anyone else, but it isn't as odd as it seems. For example, I can cook just as good, if not better than others. Due to my impairment, I need the kitchen to be organized and things to always be where they should be. I need the lights to be lower. That's my accommodation. I'm not asking you to tell me my food is amazing, if it isn't. Experiencing the food with me should be like it is with any able person, the accommodation comes in making it so that I can experience it the way you do.

It's important that everyone in the home feels safe, included and as if they are able to relax.

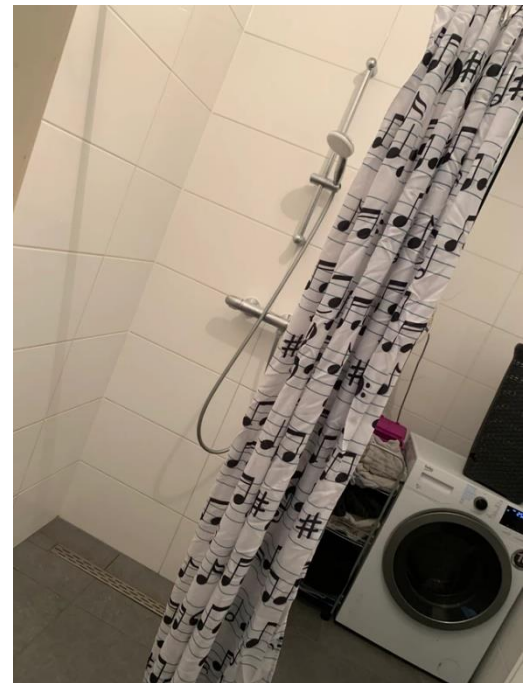
Part 3

Taking care of yourself

In the following segments, I will discuss some of my own personal means of providing care to myself. These will include topics such as hygiene, hair, bodily maintenance, choosing clothing and shoes, make-up etc. Not all of these topics will apply to every VI/Blind in the same way they don't apply to every human, they're just tips and tricks about how I do things to get along in a life that makes me happy.

Personal Hygiene

Personal hygiene is, as the name suggests, personal and every individual wants to feel like they can accomplish basic hygiene on their own. It can be very intimidating to have someone help you with very vulnerable aspects of your life. I want to talk about those aspects and get down to the nitty-gritty of it. This is not the glossed-over polite version you might want to share with your local tea club. This is the version that talks about unwanted hairs, how to cut your own nails without leaving a war scene, knowing that you didn't put a red sock with a black sock and are wearing them with purple jeans.



Showering/Bathing:

So much goes into bathing that we don't even think about. Some people use a washcloth, others use a loofa, and yet others use their hands. Some people use shampoo, conditioner, bodywash, scrubs, rinses, and any other product available to help you achieve your desired physical you. The first aspect of this is organization, as I've mentioned about 642 times. It is crucial that the vi/blind knows exactly what is where. It is REALLY unfortunate to use medicated hand cream instead of toothpaste, or to grab the toothpaste and rub it all over your dry hands.

- All things need a permanent place and for the vi/blind to know where it is at all times
- If an item is getting low or near empty it is crucial to make a note (I use apple notes on my phone)
- Scrub all surfaces, bottles, toothbrushes, etc. at least once a week. You, as the vi/blind, cannot see if there is mold, dirt, or other grossness happening, so just avoid it by staying clean.
- Wring water from washcloths and loofas and allow to hang dry after each use. You can wash synthetic loofas and washcloths regularly; I replace mine every 2 days.
- Natural loofas should be carefully monitored as they are/were alive and can carry a host of things that the vi/blind cannot see.
- Clean all things in the bath/shower systematically. I tend to work from left to right and top to bottom. I run my fingers lightly over every surface after I have cleaned it to make sure that it feels clean.

What about actual hygiene? Here we go!

- Use small amounts of shampoo/conditioner/soap/whatever fluid you're trying to utilize. You can begin to feel the weight of the right amount. Right after I lost my sight, I would accidentally go overboard with the shampoo. It's better to just start with a small amount and if it isn't enough, get a bit more.
- Close the container when you're done with the product, because you're going to knock things over.
- Read that again. **YOU ARE GOING TO KNOCK THINGS OVER.** It's confronting and it is unpleasant. Protect yourself by closing things and not using open shelving.
- When washing your parts, you might not be able to actually see dirt on you anymore. You may not even be able to feel it. Just scrub yourself systematically and use your sense of feel to gather if you got most of it.

- I didn't change razors when learning to shave blind, but you could of course go with more safe options, if possible. I shave just like I clean, systematically. I run my hands over the surface to make sure I didn't miss anything.
- You are going to be more brutal to your skin because you have to go over everything so much more thoroughly, be sure to moisturize and use sunscreen.
- Make sure you clean under your nails at least once a day, I do it twice. You use your hands for everything, clean them.

Dental Hygiene?

It can be difficult, for some, to get toothpaste on the brush and then get the brush safely to their mouths. They may also struggle with the right amount of mouth wash to pour. What about finding your toothbrush if you live with others?



- Choose products that are easier for vi/blind: toothpaste with a flip cap instead of a lid that removes, mouthwash pouches instead of trying to pour a fluid, a toothbrush that is wildly different than that of other housemates
- Place your products in a place that you will always know where to find them and replace after use
- If you struggle to get toothpaste on the brush, put it on your finger and then smoosh it on your teeth
- You can also place a small amount of toothpaste on your tongue and then use your tongue to smoosh it over your teeth
- I use an electric toothbrush and a water flosser because they're easier for me to clean and replace the tops.
- I use mint toothpaste so that when I open the flip cap, I can immediately smell that I have the correct product.
- If possible, I purchase individual mouthwash pouches or tabs. If not, I pour slowly and very little into a small plastic cup. If it isn't enough, I'll pour a little more.



Unwanted Hair

You can wax, shave or pluck any foliage from yourself that you do not want. I have a couple of stubborn thick black hairs that show up whenever they feel like it. I used to see it in the mirror and pluck it. Now, I don't see my own face in the mirror. Surprisingly, I can actually feel it, now, when one of those hairs breaks through.

- For most body hair you can shave yourself or wax. You just need to be very systematic in how you approach it
- If you have unwanted body hair that you know exists, but you cannot see, normally, try using a high magnifying glass and appropriate lighting to help you find it and remove it.
- If you are simply incapable of seeing with any clarity, ask for help from a professional or a friend.
- You can try to feel it and then pluck it, but I don't suggest it, you're more likely to create a warzone. Confront the vulnerability and get someone to help you.

Menstrual Cycles

Yep, I'm totally going there. Why? 50% of humans experience menstrual cycles personally and another huge percentage live with someone who does. It isn't gross, it's something we have to talk about because it was confronting when I realized my blind situation.

- Try to keep track of your cycles so that you're not caught of guard (but every lady knows that I think)
- Order your supplies and have them delivered if you're uncomfortable trying to find the right products in the store and are too self-conscious to ask for assistance. There are about 642 different options and getting the wrong product is uncomfortable.
- Keep your toilet area organized so that you can easily find the product you want and need.
- I keep wipes, tampons of 2 sizes and pads of 2 sizes available at all times in my restroom.

So, it's started and maybe your drawers and pants are slightly moist, now what? Maybe you can see if there is a blood spot and how big, maybe you can't.

- Soak the clothes or sheets in cold water and try to flush as much of the blood out as possible
- If you have hydrogen peroxide, you can sponge that on the suspected bloody area to remove the blood
- If you don't have hydrogen peroxide, you can gently sponge baking soda and white vinegar on the area and then rinse with cold water
- Be thorough, but never rub the fabric, always sponge gently and rinse with cold water.
- If you apply heat, the stain will set. Do not put the clothing or sheets in a dryer until you are fairly certain any blood is gone. If you've soaked it, cleaned it, soaked it and used a pre-wash laundry item, you should be fine.
- If all else fails and you're still not sure if the blood is gone, ask someone. Seriously, just ask. It's easier to ask someone to check for you than it is to walk around with a rust-colored stain on your pants.

During the cycle... seems logical but let's be real here, okay?

- Pads are more comfortable but leave you messier. Make sure you use wipes or other form of cleanup after each change. You can't see it, anymore, if you have a warzone in your lady parts, so just clean it and hope for the best.
- I use tampons and change them regularly to avoid unnecessary mess.
- Wash your hands frequently. This should go without saying, because you're vi/blind and touch everything, but especially when you're touching your lady bits repeatedly because you're on your cycle, keep your hands clean.

Trimming nails/Taking care of feet and hands

Nail cutting can be very difficult for some people who are vi/blind and can end up in a painful, bloody mess. There are "safe" nail clippers that have plastic guard to help keep you from cutting too deep. You can also create a safe nail clipper situation by binding clippers to a flat surface and having someone make a guard so that you don't cut yourself too deeply. You can also go to a professional.



- Use clippers, not scissors to trim your nails
- Use the safest form of clippers required so that you do not hurt yourself

- File regularly to keep your nails from snagging
- Lotion your hands and feet regularly (you use and rely on both, take care of them)
- Use a pumice stone to gently sand away calluses on your hands and feet. I don't recommend a metal file because you will not realize you've gone too far until it hurts, and you might be bleeding.
- You can use your own fingernails or a cuticle pusher to push your cuticles back gently.
- Try to avoid biting your nails as it is not only unhygienic but can lead to hang or snag nails.
- If you find you really struggle to take care of your hands and feet, ask for help.

When I was still in rehab to learn how to live blind, I did my nails on two separate occasions and the instructors were a little surprised. I wanted my nails to be pretty, even if I couldn't see them the same anymore.

[Painting your nails while vi/blind can be difficult but mostly you'll fix mistakes after.](#)

- Clean your nails and hands before you begin painting
- Use quality nail polish
- Do your best to paint in as few strokes as possible, starting at the cuticle and working toward the end of the nail
- Do your best to not paint your fingers, you will make mistakes, it is okay.
- After your nails are dry, use a q-tip or cotton swab dipped in nail polish remover to remove paint that went on your fingers

[Acrylic Nails](#)

- With clean hands, you'll want to follow instructions for the type of nails you purchased.
- I usually purchase stock nails and glue separately.
- I purchase paintable glue and paint the nail, not my nail so that I limit the amount of glue that can end up on my fingers
- You have a limited time between when you place the nail and when it sets, use that time to make sure you have it straight.
- If you didn't do one properly, soak it in nail polish remover until it releases and do it again.
- Paint as described above
- You can always use Vaseline or lotion on your fingers to reduce the paint that will stick, but if you're like me you'll get it on the nail itself and then your paint will be awful. Just remove it after.

Hair maintenance

Some folks really care about how their hair looks, others not so much. What you do to and for your hair is up to you. Doing whatever you do while vi/blind can be tedious and unsafe if you're not careful. I used to have front bangs/fringe, I don't anymore because even if I managed to not burn myself with the curling iron, I still couldn't see if it looked alright, so I just don't bother. It doesn't mean you shouldn't, it just means it wasn't worth the effort for me.



- Keep your products where you know you can find them and identify them.
- Only plug in hairdryers/curling irons/flatteners when you use them, unplug them and put them away when not in use.
- Place things with heating elements away from where you might accidentally touch the heating element
- Use the heat from the heating element to let you know if you're too close to your skin
- It may be better to use a curling brush and hairdryer on low to achieve straight or large curl looks
- Use timers, sing something that lasts the right amount of time, or count in your head to know you're not leaving an iron in your hair too long, you won't see the smoke if your hair is burning.
- Aiming hairspray is going to be difficult because you can't see what you're doing. Locate the point of spray shield your face and hold the spray far enough away that you don't just spray a quarter sized spot with a load of hairspray
- It can be better to use foams or gels to help keep your style as it is much easier to measure those in your hand and spread them thoroughly
- Keep track after you use your products of quantity remaining. When I could still see, I would often just browse the bathroom to see if anything needed refilling. That's much more complicated now that I'm blind. It's better to keep track while you're using the products.
- You can take photos of yourself and then zoom in on them to take a look at yourself. I sometimes use an app called BeMyEyes and just ask some random person there if my hair or makeup looks even and not ridiculous. Those people are kind volunteers who want to help, they will tell you if you have some serious issues going on with your finished product.

Make-Up

It took me quite a while and a bit of a struggle to figure out how to apply makeup without stabbing myself in the eye, looking like a clown, or being afraid of it being uneven. These are my own personal findings in make-up application, there are probably better ways, but this is my way.

- Keep your items organized
- Practice several times before you need to go out
- Use apps like BeMyEyes or a friend to give you feedback after

Foundation:

- If you haven't used or purchased the appropriate foundation, you should ask the salesperson to color match the foundation for your skin
- Verify using SeeingAI or another app that it's the appropriate color for you (you might be lighter in the winter than the summer)
- You also want to make sure you use something with SPF protection, you might not know how much sun your face is taking.
- Before I lost my vision, I used a sponge to apply foundation, now I use a sponge to dot the foundation on and my hands to spread it
- You maybe can't see if the foundation is even, that's why it's possibly better to use your hands to feel around and make sure you've spread it everywhere

Powder:

- If you're contouring your face with powder, just make sure you verify that you have the correct shade (I use an app) and try to use brushes that are light enough for you to feel how much you're applying
- I use a large brush to apply base powder and with clean dry hands lightly dust over my face to make sure the powder hasn't caked anywhere

Eyes:

- This one will take time, so give yourself time
- I started using black eyeshadow with a small brush to practice as eyeliner because it's easier and less painful when you can't see your own eye
- If you have any clarity of sight at all, you might want to use a magnifying mirror to help you see to contour shades of eyeshadow
- Make sure you regularly refresh your eye products because you won't be able to see if they're caking or old
- Mascara can easily cake, it's better to start light than to load your brush and end up with big clumps

- I have never done lash extensions or replacements; I don't have any tips other than to see a professional for application.

Lips:

- Practice first and use a cheap lip liner and lipstick that is easily removed
- Until you are comfortable that you will do it properly every time, don't use bold colors or long-lasting items. If you make a mistake, you'll be wearing it for a while.
- You can also practice with lip gloss to try to help you learn how to judge by feel and not by sight

There is one parting message concerning makeup that I really want to be clear about. Makeup should only be to make yourself feel better. If someone doesn't like or approve of how you've prepared yourself, that is a "them" problem, not a you problem. The fact that YOU went through effort to make yourself to be more presentable (at least in your own belief) is the only thing that matters. Many of us can't even see our own faces in the mirror, so if the makeup doesn't look nice, it won't bother us! We don't see it!

Clothing: choosing what to purchase, wear, and organization to make your life easier!



Clothing is such a personal and individual thing, but it's also a statement to society insomuch as society views our appearance (whether we like it or not) and forms opinions, judgments and thoughts over our appearance. I, personally, have struggled with how others might perceive me and my appearance. It's, also, important to note that this guide is written with the bias of having 39 years of full and better than average sight prior to my blindness.

Purchasing clothing

Depending on the vision level you have, you may or may not be able to purchase clothing without assistance. I have a general idea of what types of clothing I like and thus it's easy for me to understand what items I'm purchasing and what the fit will be like. For example, with pants/jeans, I already know what all of the different cuts are supposed to mean. I'm not a skinny jeans kind of girl, I prefer straight or boot cut. I, also, like a nice flare capri pant.

Understanding clothing terminology

You probably already know the basic terminology, but if you don't, it's a good idea to

do some research on different types and styles of cuts. Pants, for example, come in skinny, straight leg, boot cut, flare, capri, cargo, etc. Shirts, also, have different cuts for the neck, arms, and the general shape. If you already know the different types of cuts and the way they feel on you, it will be easier for you when you go shopping, be it in person or online.

Understand colors

I had a half a lifetime understanding what Bordeaux red is, but if you've never seen colors or don't understand what that even means, it means a dark red with purplish undertones. Some colors go really well with other colors and likewise some colors clash pretty significantly. If you don't care because it's not your problem, then you go about your bad self and wear your purple and orange! If it does matter to you, you research basic color charts and color pairings. Even if you can't actually see that Bordeaux red and champagne are a lovely combo, you can easily find articles that will help you to know the good combos and where champagne fits on the line between white and yellow. One basic tip, it's not always a great idea to mix two shades of the same color if you can't see colors like the sighted. Light blue and navy will typically go together, yes, but if the light blue has a green undertone and the navy is on the purple side, the two will clash horribly.

Understand trends

I am not a trendy person. I'm like a broken clock (it's correct twice a day). My style is trendy literally because the trend came back around and I'm still wearing it. If style and trends matter to you, there's absolutely nothing wrong with doing your research on what's in style. It's also completely legit to call ahead to clothing stores and let them know the queen/king is coming and they need a little assistance.

Tactile choices

Colors aside, the feel of clothing will be super important to the VI/blind. I, recently, purchased some new t-shirts. They are so cozy, I'm not kidding. They're the perfect jersey material, and the cut is just exceptional for me. I don't want to wear my old t-shirts anymore. The old shirts are the same colors, but different material and different cut. There's nothing overtly wrong with the older t-shirts, but the new ones FEEL so much better. It's a really good idea to make clothing choices based on tactile sensation, because you need to be able to wear this clothing, right?

Online? In person?

Here's the thing: do what makes you comfortable. If you're going to purchase online, your voice over program will happily read descriptions of everything to you. Most

websites come with photo descriptions and are more accessible than ever. If a site isn't accessible, then be a superstar and don't buy from them. Send them an email describing the lack of accessibility.

If you're going in person, have an app ready to go, such as BeMyEyes. Be prepared to ask questions or take someone with you. Of course, you can always feel your way through the store, and that's also fine. It won't help you with matching colors though.

Maintaining clothing

It's a very good idea to keep track of which clothing you have and how it needs to be properly maintained. There are several options to help VI/blind in identifying articles of clothing as well as organizing and keeping track of items.

Tags as identifiers:

Most clothing has an internal tag. You can place stitches in the tag to help identify colors and types. There are braille labels, as well. You can also sew an extra button in the corner of an item, to let you know the color/type. You could, for example, make a single stitch for black and an X to indicate dry-cleaning. A single stitch and no X would mean it's washable.



Organization:

- Even if you have a good system of identifying your articles of clothing, it's a very good idea to keep your clothing organized. It's difficult for the sighted to sort out which clothes are clean and presentable when they're mushed up in a heap on the floor; it's a ridiculous waste of time for the VI/blind to sort n sniff.
- In my closet, I have summer shirts on the left and they are ordered from white to black by color. The following section are shirts that are thicker but not necessarily winter shirts and ordered the same way, by color. This system continues with the final shirts being very thick winter shirts. I, then, order pants with the same system. After the pants, are the skirts and then the dresses, in the same system. Special articles, which are worn for specific events, are kept in garment bags with labels on the bags.
- My dresser is similarly organized insomuch as the top small drawers have undergarments and socks. There's a drawer with non-hanging tops starting with lightweight short or no sleeves with white on top black on bottom to the left which are long sleeve white on top black on bottom. This greatly reduces the amount of pawing around I need to do in order to select the shirt I want.

- I have heard/read advice indicating that you can pre-set outfits and hang them together or place them in bags together so that you know what matches, etc. Personally, my body, my mood, or both are not the same every single day. Sometimes, I wake up and my skin is super sensitive, and I really want to wear my new black V-neck t-shirt, but I do not want to wear the cute bootcut jeans I bought it to go with. Maybe, I want to wear that shirt with my big comfy sweatpants that I got when I was in university.
- Sock clips: yep, it's a thing. You can purchase sock clips like the one in the photo which allow you to make pairs from your socks. When you take the socks off, place them in a clip and put the whole thing in the washer. Most clips are washer/dryer safe. When you're ready to put them away, just fold them as usual and return the empty clip to a basket for the next pair to go into the wash.



Choosing Clothing

What's appropriate?



Each situation has a certain socially acceptable expectation of appropriate clothing. If you're at the beach, it's acceptable and probably assumed that you'll have a bathing suit with you and summer clothing. If you're at the beach in a tux, it's not inside the social norm. If you don't care that sighted people see you in a tux at the beach, you strut that tux like a pro.

That being said, there are social situations which will dictate attire and you can either avoid those situations or mold to them. If you go to a nice restaurant, you'll need nice clothing that fits well and is suitable. Professional work environments often require professional or semi-professional attire. How do you know which items are appropriate, if you haven't seen them?

- The fabric and the feel of the article will tell you much about the appropriateness of the item.
- The cut of the article will also give much information.
- Ask colleagues, friends, other guests what is the appropriate level of attire and what things are considered a no-go.
- In the same way open-toed shoes can be looked down upon, so can open back, tattoo showing clothing, wearing white to a wedding, etc.

I am not a fan of shaming the human body or indicating that something is inappropriate because of patriarchy or any other stigma that leads to the oppression of others. Personally, if you show up in your swimming attire, I won't notice or care. It is important to remember, though, that while you're allowed to be your genuine self, it's not the coolest thing to be as obnoxious as possible to others. No, you can't see yourself barely fitting into that spandex suit, but others can, have a heart, okay?

Shoes: What's right for you? Purchasing/Storage/Maintenance



Footwear is just as personal as clothing, but more importantly, it's what protects the two little lumps that allow you to walk/run/jog and be stable doing so. We make footwear choices from an early age; they just might be slightly different if you've become vi/blind.

Which footwear is right for you?

Prior to losing my vision, I wore all different kinds of footwear: high heels, flats, boots, "hooker boots", tennis shoes, crocs; it didn't matter. I just chose what was most appropriate for my clothing, the environment, my mood, etc. When I lost my vision and was trying to learn how to navigate with a blind stick, I wore mostly tennis shoes and crocs. The wearing of crocs, outdoors, ended very quickly the very first time I stepped in something wet and gross.

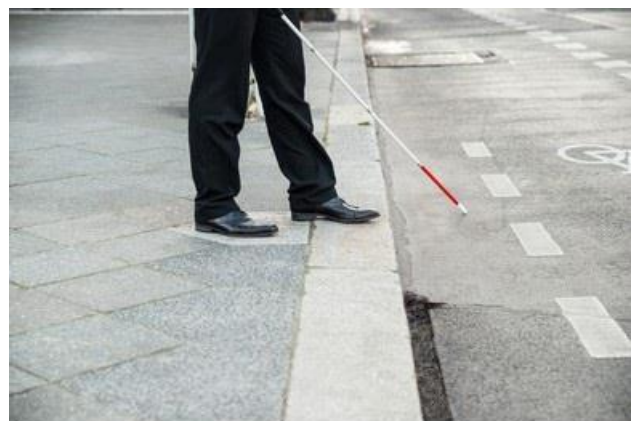
Most of my first few months of blind navigating were in tennis shoes as they were the most stable footwear in my very unstable navigation. Here's the deal, you can't see it coming. There are going to be small (or even large) holes, puddles, dog poo, gum, yes. You won't see much, if any, of it. It doesn't mean you have to give up your sense of fashion, it means that you need to be aware of your environment when making footwear choices.

Choices that should be relatively safe:

- Tennis shoes
- Flats or ballet shoes
- No or low heel boots
- Any shoe that requires laces
- Mules

Choices that should be safe if worn in the right environment:

- Sandals
- Pumps with thicker heels



- Platforms
- Slippers
- Crocs

Choices that are risky and could cause vi/blind issues:

- Open toe (curbs/puddles/dog poo)
- Stilettos (these are difficult when you can see, when you can't one missed hole in the sidewalk means a cracked ankle)
- Ill-fitting shoes
- Flip-flops

Just because something is risky doesn't mean you shouldn't choose it; just be aware of the choices you are making. My life before blindness was vastly different and the compilation of differences made my choices very different. If I wore super high heels to the bar and something unfortunate happened, it wasn't that huge of a deal. I probably had another pair of shoes in the car, but if I didn't, I could drive home with a broken shoe, or just outright barefoot. If I wear high heels to the bar, trip over something, injure myself and break my shoe, I can't just drive myself home. I will probably have to walk a fair distance to get to a bus or train station, possibly switch trams/trains/buses a few times and then walk almost a km from the last one until I get home. That's a very big difference.

Of course, in the previous scenario, a person could just call a cab, if they have the means and it's available. The person might, also, have friends that are able to help them resolve the situation. The point, here, is that when you're out and you're VI/blind, you do NOT have the same options and most of the convenient options will rely on the vi/blind asking for help and/or relying on someone else to solve the problem or deal with some pretty severe consequences.

What about color?

Even when I was sighted, I tended to choose colors that would go with many outfits. I had the basics in pumps/heels/flats (black/navy/brown/cream). I, also, had some shoes that were for specific outfits. I, still, have odd colors that don't go with everything. I'm still going to keep choosing basics but also super unique things. It's about being able to differentiate those shoes from others and making sure those shoes actually match what I want to wear them with.

Storage/Maintenance of your shoes



Shoes, like all things you want to keep nice, need to be stored properly and taken care of. That being said, if you're vi/blind, you can't just open the closet and look to see what you feel like wearing with your outfit. Good organization is the first step. The second step is having the appropriate items available to maintain your shoes.

Organizing the chaos

You can, of course, use braille tags inside your shoes to identify colors. That might be uncomfortable, though.

You probably don't want giant tags on the sole either.

It's my suggestion that your organization system is the best way to identify your shoes. For example, you could use a shoe cubby with cubes and each cube has a braille tag. When you take the shoes off, you put them away in the appropriate cubby.

I'm an organization nut, in case you hadn't noticed. I find that things are much easier if there's organization that makes sense to me. I tend to organize my shoes by type then color. I keep my sandals/summer shoes in one general area and organized by color, followed by business shoes together and organized by color. You do you with organization. Just make sure it's easy for you to find what you want.

It should be said, I keep my tennis shoes and crocs by the door. My tenny's are the most common choice when going out and my crocs are the most common choice when walking in my garden.

Taking care of your shoes: yep, matters

- Purchase and use shoe forms for expensive shoes
- Keep a waxing kit near your shoes if you intend to keep leather shoes
- Use shoehorns, don't just jam your foot in the shoe
- Clean your shoes with warm soapy water on a regular basis (ONLY THOSE THAT ARE NOT LEATHER)
- Have replacement laces and keep them with your waxing kit
- Keep an old toothbrush for helping to clean your shoes

Wait... how does a blind person wax shoes? The same way a sighted person does: systematically. If you've never waxed your shoes, ask a shoe specialist to walk you through it. I won't go into the details, on this guide. Just make sure you have your products clearly organized and labeled. Systematically work from one end of your shoe to the other and be thorough.

Purchasing shoes



While shoes are an important purchase, I'm not going to spend a huge amount of time on this topic because shoe shopping as a vi/blind isn't terribly different from clothing shopping. Also, most people will browse through shoes, pick a few choices, and then ask for assistance. For vi/blind, it's a bit different, but not terribly. You can purchase shoes online or in-person.

I've done both since I lost my vision. I still like to go in person, if possible, because then I can walk around and see if they feel comfy.

Do your research:

- Know what you want before you plan to head out
- Find stores that offer what you want
- Call ahead and see if you can make an appointment, because the last thing you want to do is stress out an overworked salesperson.

Get help:

- Everyone asks for help with shoes, do not be stubborn on this just because you want to be independent with your vi/blind
- Bring someone with you, it's more fun anyway that way
- Use apps that can help you identify shoes on the shelf
- Ask the salesperson for help (refer to the call ahead part)

Don't be the problem:

- It's a shoe store: there are going to be boxes of shoes on the floor, and you will probably stumble on them
- Accessibility is fine and hopefully people will help you out here, but don't be that person that becomes irate because someone's 5-year-old left a shoe box in the walkway
- It's okay to be indecisive and to ask for help. It's not okay to take 3 hours out of the salesperson's time because you're trying to be a princess. (Unless you're bridal shoe shopping, but then you'll have had an appointment for that)

What does this all mean?

- Wear what you want, just choose wisely
- Use organization to easily find/identify your shoes
- Use braille tags, if it's a better fit for you, to identify your shoes
- Keep shoes handy that are your most common choices
- Purchase shoes in-person or online, just do your research beforehand
- Get help and don't be a problem

Part 4

The home: More in Depth Guidance

Cleaning: Tips/Tricks/How to... yes.

I've already sort of glazed over the basics of organization and cleaning. In the following sections I will talk about how I do things, in my own home, to keep my home tidy, clean and safe. As with anything else, you want a good foundation:



- Good organization
- Keep cleaning supplies organized and labeled so that you know what you're using
- Keep good records of how much of each supply you have so that you can re-order as necessary
- Throw away out-of-date supplies
- Throw away sponges regularly

Structured Cleaning: An organized way of cleaning to try to ensure you've cleaned everything. As a vi/blind, you're probably not going to be able to see what is clean and what isn't. You can't really rely on "spot" cleaning the way sighted people can. You will need to implement structured cleaning.

What does that mean?

- Start in one corner of an area and work left to right or right to left
- Work your way systematically in whichever direction you chose and continue working away from the beginning corner until you reach the end corner or end of the space
- Utilize the same methodology when working from top to bottom.

Examples:

Vacuuming: I typically begin at the farthest point from the door. Once a month, I also vacuum the ceiling edge to remove cobwebs. On those days, I begin at the top and work left to right and top to bottom. After I've vacuumed the entire ceiling line left to right and down the wall, I begin on the floor working left to right about 1 meter length at a time. I then proceed back up to the ceiling line working left side of the room about 2 meters then back to the floor and left to right and then back up to the ceiling. I continue like this until I have gotten to the exit of the room.

Windows: This is much harder because you probably won't see streaking. It's a good idea to use a squeegee to clean your windows, when possible. Utilize the same structured system: Soak the window left to right and top to bottom with window cleaner. Squeegee off liquid from left to right and top to bottom with squeegee, wiping the squeegee after each swipe.

Cleaning Specific Areas:

Bathroom/Shower:

- Work systematically cleaning one area at a time
- Because I'm going to make the area wet, I vacuum before scrubbing
- I clean sink/ faucet/ countertop/ drain before I scrub down shower
- After I scrub the shower working systematically from left to right and top to bottom
- Empty the trash and wipe out the trash can every week
- Clean the toilet in the same systematic manner, make sure you clean the handle
- Throw away sponge after cleaning the toilet
- Wipe down all surfaces after cleaning and bleach the towel or if its paper, throw it away
- Mop systematically from farthest area from door to the door and make sure you have good ventilation (you can't see mold!)
- Make sure you replace fire detector batteries every month on the 1st of the month. (I use rechargeable batteries)



Kitchen:

- Stack dishes neatly and begin wiping down backsplashes and countertops
- Work top to bottom and either left to right or right to left wiping continuously toward the sink and pushing all scraps into your hand. Throw the scraps away
- Wipe down your stove systematically and make sure you remove any buttons and clean them thoroughly at least once a week.
- For gas burners, make sure you remove the plates and clean them once a week.
- If you're hand-washing the dishes, make sure you work each dish systematically using your fingers to make sure you haven't missed anything.
- If you're using a dishwasher, make sure you clean out the dishwasher filter and refill the salt at least once a week.

- Rinse the dishes thoroughly before placing in the dishwasher and always place sharps down so that you don't injure yourself when emptying the dishwasher
- Remember to wipe down all appliances every time you wash dishes (you can't see prints or smudges).
- Wipe down all cabinet doors and fridge doors.
- Empty your fridge and wipe down every shelf (including doors) just before you put new groceries in your fridge.
- Old food can become moldy and rotten very quickly, make sure that you always systematically put leftovers in the fridge in a manner so that you know how old things are
 - I tend to put new containers behind the previous container.
- Clean your oven out at least once a month, but it's a good idea to do it after every time you bake something.
- Wipe out your microwave at least once a week
- Don't forget to wipe down your exhaust fan or stove hood.
- Wipe down jars, doorknobs, and the trashcan. The trashcan is super important, wipe it down at least once a day.
- Use care and not a lot of fluid if you need to clean around outlets
- Wipe your light switches, those get gross in a hurry and you can't see it.
- Empty your drawers and shelves once a month and wipe them down, they get gross



Living Areas:

- Dusting can be tedious for anyone, when you're vi/blind it's a new experience. Use items such as the Swiffer duster to help you easily dust once a week.
 - If you have blinds, you can use a duster to also clean the slats of your blinds, weekly.
 - Wipe down wooden surfaces with appropriate oils and cleaners to keep the wood supple
- Wipe down pleather surfaces regularly
 - I don't suggest eating at the couch because we vi/blind tend to make messes, but if you do, make sure you regularly clean your couch

- Clean/wash your curtains at least once a month if you have pets, every 6 months if you don't.
- Wash throw-rugs and blankets weekly
- Make sure you steam area rugs at least once a month if you have pets, once a quarter if you don't
- Make sure to wipe around your houseplants and check for dead leaves
- Use smart lights so that you know when your lightbulbs have gone dead, but also to set ambiance easier
- Make sure to wipe down light fixtures and baseboards at least once a month (they get dirty and you might not see it)

Sleeping Areas:

- Change your sheets regularly, I change mine once a week. Wipe down your bed when you do.
- Flip your mattress at least once a month
- You can place 2 or 3 dryer sheets on your mattress before you put your mattress pad and bottom sheet on to provide a nice fresh smell
- Make sure you dust regularly not just to keep it tidy, but dust mites can develop and negatively impact your health
- Check for stray socks regularly, too!

Office/Craft Areas:

- As with the other areas, work systematically but make sure you dust regularly, empty trash bins, and wipe surfaces.
- When dealing with cords, make sure you wipe them down regularly as they collect dust.
- If you eat or drink at your desk, make sure you wipe your desk down frequently.
- Your computer is probably super important to you if you're vi/blind, make sure you keep it dust free and that your mouse/mousepad and keyboard are regularly cleaned using approved cleaning supplies. (Usually air cleaners)
- Check batteries and clean your braille display off too
- Remember to charge items that you don't use frequently but might want at a moment's notice

"Spot" Cleaning: Those things that need cleaned regularly but also sporadically

Accessibility tools:

- Wipe down your stick and ball at least once a week
- Make sure that you always have a replacement ball on hand
- Groom your guide dog regularly and make sure you maintain good dental care for them.
- Wash the guide dog's bedding/cage, leads, and toys at least once a month but also spot clean when it's gross outside.
- Wipe down the guide dog harness at least once a week, but also after he/she decided to roll in the mud
- Use glasses wipes to wipe your headsets and phone regularly
- Wash your typical walking shoes, but especially after a particularly muddy experience



"Spot" Cleaning:
Accessibility tools
Clothing/Fabrics
Outside Things

Clothing/Fabrics:

- You are not going to see if you are making a stain worse, so you need to be careful with how you treat clothing
- Freshly stained fabrics and clothing should always be blotted dry.
- There are lots of tips for what kind of product to remove certain things, look those up before you do something that will make it worse
- Red wine can be removed by using white wine
- Many stains can be removed using baking soda or a combo of baking soda and white vinegar
- Never "rub" or scrub stains, blot gently to try to move the stain
- Ask for help if you need it, this is important.

Outside things:

- You can use the same systematic approach to doing outside things that don't need to be done all the time, like leaf raking.
- Water your garden left to right or right to left and front to back
- Rake leaves right to left or left to right and front to back or back to front.
- Sweep your porch starting at the door and working out
- Shovel snow starting at your door and working out
- Keep ice melt handy if you live in an area prone to freezing

- Hire someone to clean your gutters regularly, you do NOT want them clogged during rainy season.
- Hire someone or ask someone to come check your roof and vents at least once a year.

Laundry: Tips/Tricks/How does that work?!

I don't remember how old I was when I first started doing my own laundry. I had sight then, though. Doing laundry without sight is a whole different animal. Most laundry machines are not vi/blind accessible. Portioning and pouring liquid or granulated detergent isn't pleasant. Each item should be washed differently and with different temperature settings. It gets complicated, even for the sighted. In this section, I'll discuss how I have learned to cope with vi/blind laundry pitfalls.



Identification & Sorting:

Most items of clothing come with tags to identify what the article of clothing is comprised of, as well as how to properly clean the item. If you're vi/blind, you might struggle to read those tags. You can use an app to read it for you, ask a friend, or use general feel to know what type of fabric it is. What about color though?

- Keep articles of clothing sorted from the time of acquisition until the time of disposal.
- Have different baskets, piles, or whatever you want to use to sort for basic

darks/brights/lights/whites.

- Special items should be kept apart for more specialized washing.
- You can't see what you're dealing with, it's better to sort it the moment you take it off so that the whole way through the process you know what it is.
- After washing, don't dump several loads together, keep loads separated so that you always know what items are clean, what colors and density they are.

What does that mean?

I have sorting bags to separate my dirty clothes into. When I am done wearing the item and it is ready for wash, I toss it into the appropriate bag. When a bag gets full, I already know what's in the bag. For example, the dark/black bag might be full, and I know that only dark/black items are in that bag and the laundry needs to be washed on cold and with dark pods, if I have them.

Washing Machines and how to deal with it:

Older washing machines are likely to pose a significant problem to vi/blind people as they often do not have a reasonable way for non-sighted to know which program the machine is set to. Some washers have a rotary click system, others have a digital system that may or may not have beeps, and others have smart functions.



Rotary Click Systems:

- If the starting point doesn't already have a raised bump, get some help to place a braille label at the beginning notch
- Use an app or the help of a friend to identify how many clicks for each setting
- Make a braille list for yourself indicating the number of clicks and which function.
- You can place raised dots at the specific function locations to help you find them, if you struggle to hear or feel the clicks

Digital Systems w/ or w/out beeps:

- Digital systems are by far the most difficult for vi/blind because there's almost no way to tell which function you are beginning with
- Many machines do not have a reset to start function, so it might be useful to make a note for yourself as to which function you used on the previous cycle
- Digital systems may have beeps to indicate if you have selected a function, if the function is available, or if the system is reset. You will probably need to read the online version of the user manual to find specific instructions on how to help yourself with it.
- I do not recommend digital systems unless you have already tried the model out and can identify the programs and functions easily

Smart Washers:

- I have a smart washer and love it. My washer has both a rotary with clicks AND beeps, but also is completely controllable with an app.
- I utilize the app, on my phone, to set the program I want for each type of laundry.
- I can check the app to see not only how long the program will take at the beginning, but also updated estimations as the program continues.

- I am notified both by the machine and the app as to when the program is finished.
- My washer is a washer/dryer combo, so I can adjust the program for special needs of different articles of clothing.

What does all of this mean?

Washers and dryers are expensive appliances, but most people use them regularly. You are, certainly, capable to use them, even if you are vi/blind. Make sure you purchase or have a system with rotary with clicks, smart technology or a digital system wherein you can easily identify the function.

The Washing Process:

Different types of clothing require distinct functions/types of laundry processing. After you've identified the appropriate function on your machine, you will need to figure out how to get the appropriate amount of detergent/softener as well as the right amount of clothing in the machine.

How Much to Put into the Machine?



- Each machine is different and requires a different weight specification, first check the weight specification of your machine.
- Use an audible scale to weigh the laundry OR count articles
 - For a 4kg load this is about 8 items (4 towels, 2 shirts, 2 jeans)
 - It's best to weigh your loads until you know the feel of how much is just right
- Never overfill, items won't get washed properly

and you can damage your machine

- If you have a top load machine, try to load your machine evenly so that you don't have an unbalanced load

Detergent:

- I STRONGLY suggest that vi/blind take the extra expense of purchasing laundry pods. You can purchase dark/light/bright/colors options and label them in your laundry room.
- Laundry pods are typically all-in-one, and you just drop the pod in with the laundry



- Both powder and liquid detergent can be measured. You can use your fingers to feel when the measuring apparatus is full.
- Use your fingers to find the appropriate receptacle for the detergent or softener and use both hands to pour the contents into the receptacle
- Remember to wipe out the receptacle after every use of the machine

It's done washing, now what?

- If you have a separate dryer, you will use the same basic premise as the washer to identify dryer programs.
 - Make sure you clean out the fuzz filter before and after each use of the dryer.
 - If you have a compression dryer, make sure you empty the water tank before and after each use of the dryer
 - If you have a combo washer/dryer, and your cycle has finished, make sure that you take the laundry from the appliance and keep it separate from any other laundry; clean or dirty.
 - Put away your clean laundry in an organized and specific manner so that you might find the desired item in future.



What does that mean?

After you are able to identify your washer and dryer functions, it's time to wash. You need to know what items you're washing and which detergent along with how much you need to use. I strongly recommend you purchase all-in-one pods. If you don't care too much about washing things together, you could get an all-purpose pod. If you want to be precise and use dark/light/color/white pods, you absolutely could. Just make sure you label each container. After your load is washed/dried, make sure you put the items away where they belong so that you can find them easily in future.

For example, if I were to wash a load of blacks, I would use a cold setting for the wash and more than likely an acrylic setting for the dry. When the load was finished, I would then hang the shirts in their places, fold the pants and put them away, and put the towels away where they go. If you lump all of your laundry together, it will be MUCH more difficult to find specific articles and put them away for later use.

Groceries and Inventory Management



When I was sighted, I didn't enjoy shopping and I still don't. I was never a fan of crowds, unsupervised children running amok, or slow-walking people that take up an entire aisle. (Yes, I have slow-walkers rage.) I lost my sight and at first, I didn't even know how to get to the grocery, let alone how I was going to find stuff.

As soon as I got my blind stick, I was off to the races, but I had a new problem: How do I get it all back with me when I have a hand full of stick!?

Previously, I used to do groceries once a week. I would purchase everything I needed, load it into bags in the back of my car and take it home. I tended to make other inventory purchases on one of my regular shopping days. This wasn't going to be an option anymore.

At the very beginning, I just went to my regular shop. I knew how it was laid out and I knew where the products I wanted were. Most people avoided me and I could get what I needed. It wasn't long before I ran into some issues: they moved products, someone threw something at my head just to see if I would react, my stick got stuck under an aisle, I couldn't use a cart and my stick! What to do?! Here's my guide on how to handle these things. It's not as tough as it seems.

Shopping in Person: Make a Plan!



As with everything else, start off organized and plan your shopping trip.

- Make a list with the items you need
- Make sure you note any coupons or discounts that you know to be available for items you are purchasing
- If you know the basic layout of the store you're visiting, make your list order to match the order of product placement
- Keep in mind how much you can carry in a bookbag and a rolling shopping bag

- While shopping, try to keep heavy items where you can reach them. You'll want to put the heavy items on the belt first because they need to go into your bags first
- If you're paying in cash, I'll go over how to identify cash in a later segment
- I strongly suggest paying with PIN or Debit. You can use your BeMyEyes or SeeingAI app to ensure that the price on the screen is the price you expect and are told is what you're paying.
- Some stores offer scanners so that you can scan your own items as you shop, if you have enough vision to utilize this function it might be useful. It isn't for me.

Identifying what you need: This can be tricky

- Use QR codes if the item has it and you can find it, your phone will read it out
- Use SeeingAI to read text to you that's on the packages
- Hand-held scanners also exist to help read things to you (Looky4)
- Use your hands for produce, you would anyway
- Do not use your hands in the meat aisle. If you don't like apps on the phone, ask for assistance. Meats carry all sorts of parasites, bacteria, viruses that you don't need to be spreading everywhere.
- Do not paw breads and squishy things. It's okay to be gentle when touching but you don't need to ruin the bakery section just because you're VI/blind
- Take your time. I'm serious. If someone has no patience with you, that seems like a them problem.
- If you have an allergen problem, make triple sure the product you're ordering does not contain that item before you purchase it. This is one of the reasons I tend to order online instead of in-person.

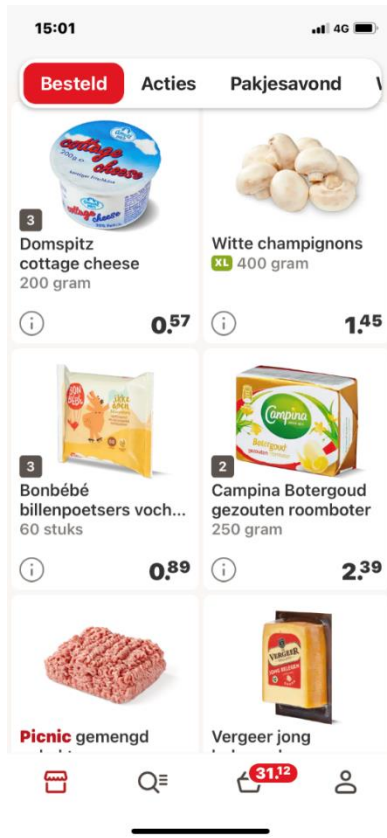
Helping Others to Help You

- Unless people are or live with someone that is vi/blind they have no idea what you deal with
- Use your words:
 - Excuse me
 - Could you help me with...?
 - I'm looking for...
 - I don't know what "over there" means, could you give me directions, please?
 - I don't see aisle numbers, could you tell me how they are numbered so that I can find it myself?
 - I am vi/blind, I don't see what you're talking about.
- Ask for help but be clear and precise

Shopping Online: Groceries and Inventory Made Easier!

Even before the whole pandemic situation of 2020, I began using online ordering systems because it was so much easier, caused less stress and pressure, as well as ensuring that I would purchase what I wanted. Perhaps, purchasing online isn't an option in all locations. Luckily for me, online ordering and home delivery are very much an option. We'll go over the benefits and how to do that, now.

Groceries: On your phone or on your computer



On your phone:

- Many grocery stores have apps you can download
- Your internal voice over should work with just about grocery app out there
- Many grocery stores also have online ordering through their website; which your internal voiceover should read for you
- I use my aftershokz to listen to what's being said with voice over while I order so that only I hear my voice over and I'm handsfree to manipulate my phone
- Most apps and websites list allergens directly on the product
- Most apps and websites also allow a filter or search selection.
- Create and account and sign in because most apps and websites keep a log of your frequently purchased items and you can just add them to your order

For example: I use both AH and Picnic apps to purchase groceries. Both of these apps keep track of my previous orders as well as my frequently purchased items. Both apps work well with my voice over. Picnic redirects me for payment before delivery while AH asks for payment when they deliver. Both apps provide a detailed list of what I've ordered and options for delivery date and time. This is my most frequent form of grocery shopping because most of the time I can just reorder a previous order with a couple of tweaks.



On the pc:

- Utilize your voice over program (JAWS/Fusion/etc.) to navigate through the grocery website.
- A braille display can make reading descriptions much easier
- Online purchasing is similar to app purchasing but can be more complicated because pc websites generally contain more headers and sections
- Use the same basic principles as ordering with an app, create an account, keep track of purchases, give yourself time to listen to each item
- One benefit of ordering on the computer is that you can type searches for items much easier

Purchasing Inventory Online or with the Phone:

- Many shops, these days, offer delivery on orders made via their app or their website
- Purchasing home inventory is very similar to groceries when done online or via an app with the exception that delivery will be from a delivery company rather than the store itself
- Make sure you clearly listen for the delivery fees, options, times, dates, etc. before approving the purchase. (I ordered something and didn't realize the delivery date was 8 weeks away!)
- Make sure you double check quantities in your final order
- Make a note on your order that you are VI/Blind and that the delivery person may NOT deliver the item to a pickup point.
- Many pharmacies will actually deliver your medications for you, if you're VI/Blind. You can re-order refills from the pharmacy website and have them delivered: TRY IT!

What does all of that mean?

How, where, and when you shop are all very personal, but as a vi/blind it can be vastly different and difficult. Most people are accommodating and will help or at the very least get out of your way. If you choose to shop in-person, then also make the choice to be assertive and vocal because not everyone is aware of you and your needs. If you choose to shop online, then be your own oversight. Either way, have the motivation and the self-trust to shop for yourself. You CAN do it.

Medications & Doctors: Keeping Track is a Full-Time Job!

I am not a medical professional and all advice/tips/tricks in this section are not meant as medical advice but as a way of keeping track of the medications and medical advice you receive. It has been my experience that most VI/blind folks have medications for their visual situation, but many also have medications for other things. Many people keep over-the-counter medications and vitamins. We, also, need to keep track of doctors/specialists, appointments, recommendations, labs, etc. It can be a struggle for the sighted and almost impossible for VI/Blind.

Medications: Organize it!



Each medication comes with its own storage and use requirements. It can be a struggle to try to not only identify your medication, but also when to take each medication, and how each medication should be stored. You will need to create a system for yourself and ask those that live with or visit you to respect your medication storage system.

Medication Inserts: On paper that you can't read with your own eyes, now what?

You likely have a way in which you can read paper mail such as handheld text enlarging device, a device with a camera and voice over, glasses which capture and then read for you, or an app on your phone. It will be very time consuming for you to re-read through any medication inserts every time.

- Scan all inserts and save them as pdfs, in a medical file, with the appropriate name of the medication as the file name
- You can further sort the individual uploads into folders: I put eye medications in one folder, diabetes medications in another, etc.
- Make a short list of important points from each medication and have the list accessible by both your mobile and your computer
- Make braille labels with pertinent information for medications you will have for a long time: if you have one box of short-term insulin and one box of long-term insulin, label one of the boxes so that you know the difference.

Keeping the medication safe and organized



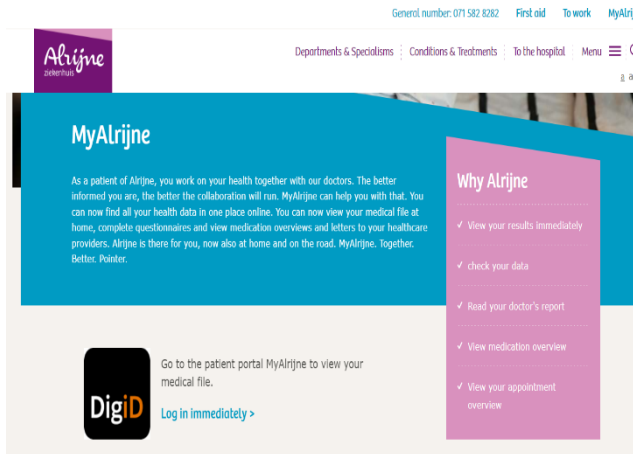
You have a good idea of how you're supposed to store and use the medication and you've made a way for yourself to find that information easily. The next part is to organize your medication, for yourself, in such a way as to follow the guide for storage but also make it accessible.

- Keep refrigerated medications together in one spot, with labels on the medications
- Use a box within the fridge or one of the fridge door boxes to ensure that only your medication is in that box
- You do not want spills from raw meats or juices to affect your medication, so keep your refrigerated medication separate and sealed
- Keep the non-refrigerated medications all together in a safe place (usually out of light)
- Label the medications because it will be very difficult to sort your medications based on feel
- Use a daily pill box if you have many different pills that need taken at different times during the day
- Use apps/alarms to remind you when to take which medication
- Put your medication back right after you use it
- Non-medication medical items and long-term scripts should be kept in an organized manner, perhaps near to the medication if used frequently
 - I have a box just for my diabetes stuff, it contains: monitors, strips, dextrose cubes
 - I have a separate box for my prescribed supplements/vitamins because I often get 3 months at a time, and I don't need all of that in one spot where I take my daily medication
 - Keep gloves, bandages, swabs, etc. in a box so that you can easily find them

What does this mean?

Organization is a key aspect of being safe with your medications. It's always a good idea to be able to have access to read the medication inserts, so make a way that's accessible for you. Label medications and medication organization systems so that you can easily find what you need. Utilize apps/alarms to help you take your medication at the right time and to know when you need to order a refill.

Doctors, specialists, physical therapists, medical professions: Keeping Track of advice & Appointments



I visit a plethora of medical specialists regularly along with a few specialists I visit irregularly. I, also, want to keep track of previous specialist information such as: when did I visit, what was the advice, what was prescribed, do I need to visit again. It's important to keep track of these things. Most specialists, these days, keep online systems; which is incredibly helpful for the vi/blind.

- Find out if your practitioner has an online patient file system
- Access all online patient file systems and download your file
- Organize your files by practitioner type or disease so that you can quickly find what you need
- Your practitioner patient portals often have appointment reminders, lab results, and medication refill options. This is a great way for you to have access to those things without needing to upload paper documentation
- Ask your practitioner to send you digital updates on your file/their advice
- Set alarms, reminders, and calendar appointments in your phone to help you keep track of medical appointments or procedures
- Ask your practitioner for all leaflets to be supplied digitally instead of on paper so that you can also read them

What does this mean?

Instead of being limited by inaccessible systems, ask your practitioner to digitize your information. Use the digital formats to help keep yourself organized in concern to your practitioner, their advice, and appointments. Keep files, for yourself, of past/present/future practitioners, their advice, and appointments. You are your own best advocate and not being able to read paper documentation can make you vulnerable.

Administration

I've already talked about how important organization is for the vi/blind. It is especially so when it comes to personal/household administration. As a vi/blind you're likely to not be able to read paper mail without a tool or assistance. Trying to organize paper mail, too, can be a challenge. In this era, it's easy to get much of this digital; which can be great, IF you know how to deal with it as a vi/blind person.

Paper Documentation: How to Cope with it.



The vast majority of governmental institutions and businesses you deal with do not know or care that you are vi/blind. They will send you paper mail and documentation, on regular white paper, with regular black font, in regular 10-12 point font. For most of us, that's completely useless. So what can you do?

Tools

- Desktop Digital Magnifier with Speech
 - This item is very expensive. It has a camera which captures what is on the tray. You can enlarge the view, change the contrast or colors, and have the machine read to you. The machine is capable of saving what it captures, as well.
- Magnifiers
 - There are many hand-held magnifiers; which allow you to quickly look over things. The Looky4 is a hand-held magnifier; which could be used for short documentation and recipes
- Phone w/ Apps and voice over (Seeing AI)
 - I tend to use my phone with Seeing AI frequently, for small items, because it's just so much quicker than anything else
- Scanner in combination with Jaws and pdf reader
 - If you don't feel like waiting for your digital magnifier with speech to capture 15 pages and then read them to you, you can scan each page in on your scanner and then have Jaws read it to you.



Each tool has it's best uses as well as positive and negative aspects. If you have a one or less page document, it's probably best to use a magnifier or your phone. If you have a 2 to 3 page paper document, it might be wise to use the desktop digital magnifier. If you are dealing with something much larger, it might save you time and effort to just scan it and have Jaws read it to you, or better yet, connect your braille display and read it for yourself.

Organizing It:

- Make or purchase braille labels to help organize file folders
- Use a system where you always place the newest document from the same organization at the front or the back of the file so that your files are always in order
- Utilize stickers, bumps, or flags to help you locate important documents quickly
- Shred anything you aren't keeping. You may have missed confidential information that was printed on it.
- At the start of a new year, purchase enough document boxes to store your file folders.
- Label each box with the year and which file folders it contains
- Later, if you need to find things you will have a stack of boxes from each year and it will be easier for you to find
- You don't need to keep most documentation longer than 7 years. Shred documents that you no longer intend to keep

Digital Documentation: How to Cope with it



Thankfully, much of your documentation can be received digitally; which is a huge help if you're adequate with your computer/phone/braille display. Most organizations will deliver your documentation either through their own portal or to your email. You can pay most bills online; which is very handy since you probably cannot fill out a manual payment form anymore.

Tools:

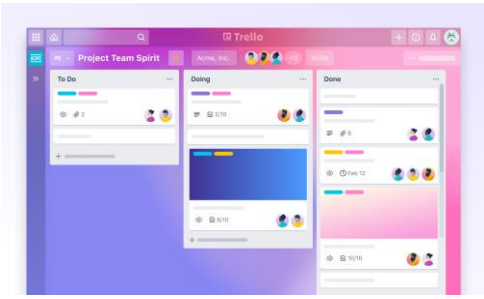
- Computer equipped with voice over software
 - Your computer needs to be able to talk to you either by voice or by braille to let you know what your eyes can no longer see
 - You can use a variety of voice over software, but I strongly suggest JAWS/Fusion
- Braille display
 - This will allow you to physically read braille from electronic sources
 - This is a great option if you don't want everyone to hear your voice over
- Accessible phone
 - You can access much of the same software/tools from an adequate phone

- Email account
 - Every organization you want to get documentation from will want you to sign up or register. It goes without saying that you will need an email account for this
- A photograph of your signature
 - While it seems scary to have a photograph of your signature on file on your computer, it comes in handy if you want to sign forms digitally
 - Adobe Acrobat allows you to “fill in and sign” documents. If you save the picture of your signature under “signature” you can then attach it to anything that needs signed while you’re using Adobe Acrobat
- Photographs (secure) of your ID
 - You will want to make sure the photographs of your ID are in a secure place.
 - I tend to keep the files separate and named something that I will know what it means, but others might not.
 - This is super handy if you need to prove who you are
 - It’s even more handy if someone asks for your social number and you can’t read it. Jaws will read it for you.

Organizing Digital Documentation

- Use the same format you might use for paper files: make individual file folders for each organization and store your received documents in those file folders
 - I tend to have a main folder “Administration”
 - Inside I have subfolders with the years, such as “2022”
 - In each subfolder I will have subfolders with organization names, such as “Water Company”
- Keep files for at least 7 years
 - At the start of 2022, it is safe for me to delete the file that says 2014
- Make sure you fully delete anything you no longer want
- Take the hard drive out of any computer or laptop that you will no longer use.

Keeping Track of Things



I used to write lists for myself and keep agendas, on paper. I still make lists and use agendas, but now it is all digital. I can't see my own writing, so it just makes sense, for me. If you're quick with a pc or phone, it might be beneficial to try to keep track of things digitally.

Tools:

- Google Calendar
 - This can be synced with almost every device
 - You can enter dates with just about any device and open it on any other device where you are signed in
 - Many apps will sync with google calendar
 - You can get notifications by text, email, or sound
- Trello
 - This is a great app to make lists with
 - You can make boards, where you can make several cards
 - One of my boards has a list of all of the groceries I need to remember to order, when I've ordered each item, I clear the card from the board
 - You can make all kinds of boards: Chores boards, Grocery boards, Book Club boards, the options are endless
- Apple Notes
 - If you have an iPhone, this is a handy tool for making quick notes
 - Maybe you need to "jot" down a number, the voice over will read it for you later
 - You can also save pictures and links in apple notes
- Apps that utilize my phone calendar
 - Several of the grocery store apps I use ask me if I want to set my delivery appointment in my agenda. This is great because then I don't have to do it and now it's synced everywhere
- Apps from organizations I frequent
 - Basic services, healthcare, utilities
 - You can use apps that shut your lights off (Alexa) and apps that tell you how much electricity you're using
 - I even have an app that tells me what my blood sugar is (Freestyle Libre): The same app tells me when I need to change my monitor and warns me when my sugar is too high or too low

What Does This Mean?

While it is possible to cope with paper documentation within your personal/household administration, it is probably easier and better to try to get most of your documentation in digital form. If you're reading this, you already know how to use voiceover software with or without the braille display. Don't be afraid to give it a go with everything.

Pets: Is it Possible?



Many people, the world over, enjoy the company of pets. Of course, it is possible to adequately care for a pet, even if you are VI/Blind. Caring for another living creature entails varying degrees of effort, from sighted and non-sighted, alike. If you already had pets before you lost your vision, you might find it slightly easier to manage them while vi/blind. If you are looking to get your first pet and are already vi/blind, it can seem like a

monumental thing; it is for sighted people, too.

Understanding the Requirements of the Pet

The starting place for being able to care for a pet is to understand what that pet needs and wants. This guide doesn't have nearly enough space to go into detail, but I will lightly touch on some basics. Each type of pet is going to require housing, food, health care, entertainment, exercise, and socialization (with the exception of a few).

Housing/Environmental Needs:

While housing some pets is relatively effortless, others require more from their human friend.

Cats & Dogs:

- Can live indoors with their human
- Need a place to expel waste
 - Litterboxes can be cleaned either with dumping the entire box on a regular basis or by scooping.
 - Scooping boxes is possible, just make sure to work systematically
 - Picking up dog waste is exceedingly more difficult and may require help from someone
 - In the Netherlands, blind people aren't required to pick up the waste from their service dog, because it's difficult to see poop

- Typically exist in the same environments as humans (excepting extreme cold and extreme heat and breed)
 - Don't try to keep an arctic breed (husky) in a warm climate.
 - Don't try to keep bald or hairless breeds in cold environments.
- Comfortable places to sleep and relax
 - Cats enjoy cat towers, cardboard boxes, high shelves
 - Dogs enjoy their own crate with or without a bed in it.
- At least one place that is theirs and they can go to
 - This can be the same place they sleep or relax
 - My cats tend to go into little corners that are difficult for me to find them
 - My dogs tend to go into their crates or onto their beds that are by the couch.

Rodents/Small Animals:

- Typically require closed housing
- Most rodent housing can be purchased with waste trays that can be dumped regularly
- Some of these critters can be kept outside (bunnies) and others should probably be kept inside (hamster).
- Most animals will want a place of their own, make sure you have items in the cages that allow these critters to hide or escape.

Reptiles:

- Typically require warmer environments
 - It is possible to purchase smart thermometers to regulate temperature and even humidity levels
- Usually require a terrarium with light and temperature control
 - Smart lighting is easy enough to adjust and setup with your phone
- May require water features
- Will want a place of their own
- Need waste removal/cage cleaning
 - It would be wise to ask the assistance of a reputable reptile specialist to help set up a terrarium that is adapted to your vi/blind cleaning requirements.

Fish:

- Require aquarium with controlled temperature and lighting

- There are several smart lighting and temperature regulating options for fish tanks
- Water will require controlled chemical and ph levels
 - PROScan from JBL offers a variety of water testing kits that show results on your smart phone so that you can easily monitor the safety of the water for your fish
- Waste/Filtration system
 - The standard fish tank setups are not difficult to change even while vi/blind and with the help of a reputable specialist you can create an eco-system wherein bottom feeders help reduce/eliminate much of the waste
- Heating System
 - There are smart heaters available, which not only provide consistent heat, but also allow you to monitor heater levels from your phone

Birds:

- Require an enclosed space
 - You can get a bird cage or build one, either way, your birds need a place to live where you don't have to worry about their safety
- Are type dependent for heating/humidity needs
 - Some birds are content in your living environment, others need it warmer, dryer, more humid, etc. Make sure you know what your bird needs
- Require places to perch comfortably
 - Bigger birds do not want to wrap their feet around tiny sticks in the same way that smaller birds probably would not choose to sit flat footed all the time
 - Make sure you offer lots of places for your birdies to be comfortable
 - These perches will get dirty, make sure you can clean or replace them regularly
- Also enjoy places to hide

Other: (Think ferrets, etc.)

- These creatures are likely much like cats & dogs and can be kept indoors
- Will also require a place to eliminate (use a litter box with woodchips)
- Require hiding spaces (tend to find their own)

Food & Nutrition



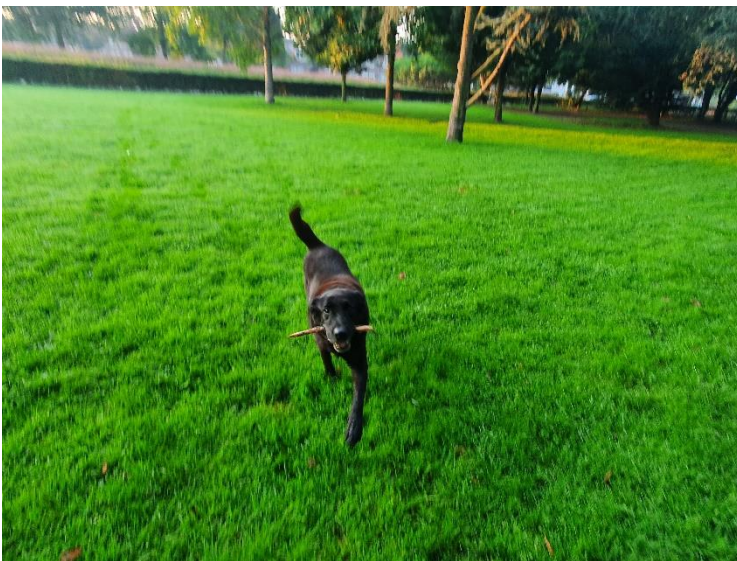
PURINA
PRO PLAN
VETERINARY
DIETS

Each animal will require their own type of food and nutritional intake. You can search this online, ask a specialist, read a book about it. Just make sure that you provide adequate nutrition for your pet. As with any type of vi/blind situation, just make sure you stay organized, use your tools, and work methodically. For example, your pet might need 150g of food twice a day. You can purchase a talking scale to tell you if you have the right amount. You can also purchase a scoop that will hold just about 150g of

food. Either way, your dog will get the appropriate amount of food.

Birds, fish, rodents, etc., all can be fed using the same method as with cats & dogs. Other animals can be more difficult with feeding, such as those that consume prey. In this situation, it would be wise to consult a specialist on the best way to safely feed your animal.

Healthcare & Exercise



Animals under your care need appropriate healthcare and most will require regular exercise. It might seem very daunting to make sure you can adequately cope with both of those requirements. How are you going to know if your pet is sick? You can't see it!

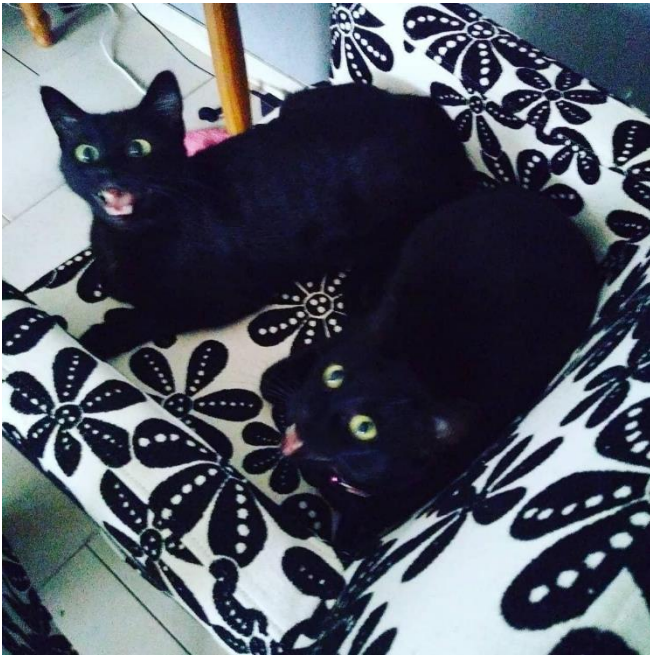
- Develop a strong understanding/bond with your pet
 - When you have a strong bond and understanding of your pet you also

know when your pet is behaving out of the norm

- Handle your pet every day
 - If you develop a good relationship with your pet and handle them regularly, your hands will feel if something is not right
 - Their behavior can also be noted as abnormal (they are normally affectionate and suddenly aren't)

- Find a veterinarian specialized for your pet and take your pet to them for regular health checks
 - Most veterinarians are specialized in dogs & cats, but if you have a different kind of pet, make sure your veterinarian is specialized in that species
 - Most vet clinics will be happy to let you come in and weigh your pet, or just ask general questions (if you are their client)
- Weigh your pet and monitor your pet's intake and output
 - You already know what and how much you are giving your pet
 - If you can't hear them eat, you will know if their bowls are not getting emptied
 - You will be cleaning their waste, so you should know if it smells weirder than usual or doesn't seem to be enough
 - I can't see my dog expel waste, but I can smell when he is doing it. He tends to expel waste 3 or 4 times a day. If he doesn't, then I know something isn't right.
- Use your nose
 - You can smell if your pet doesn't smell like they usually do, and this can indicate a problem
 - Your cat's ears smell funky? It's probably ear mites. Take your kitty to the vet for an ear cleaning.
 - Your dog's breath is terrible? This could be a dental or digestive problem. Make an appointment with the vet.
 - Your bird has a funky smell. but you can't find the source, this could be an infected foot, make and appointment with the vet.
- Different types of animals have different activity requirements
 - Walking a dog is easy enough, just make sure you research good places to take your furball so that he or she can socialize with others safely
 - Cats tend to exercise themselves, but if they don't, you can get toys wherein you actively interact with them
 - You can clip your bird's wings (or ask someone to do it) so that they can have some freedom from the cage to exercise and spread those beautiful wings
 - Wheels and other exercise devices can be purchased for rodents
 - Bunnies who are house trained will get their own exercise, but if your bunny is a caged bunny, you can set up a big area for her/him to play for a couple of hours a day

Socialization & Entertainment



Your pet doesn't want to be lonely and bored any more than you do. Some pets (beta fish male) can't be with others, but the vast majority not only can be with others, they WANT to be around others. Animals are not really meant to sit in a small enclosure, all day, with nothing to do, and wait for you to pay attention to them for 15 minutes out of the day. You need to provide ways for them to entertain themselves and ways for them to get socialization.

As mentioned previously, you will want to handle your pets regularly. This is a form of socialization. Your pet has a personality and will tell you how much attention they want/require. I have one cat that bring me hair ties to play with, otherwise she mostly ignores me. Meanwhile, I have another cat that seeks me out non-stop and wants attention constantly.

If you can handle more than one of a type of pet, it's a good idea for them to have a friend. Make sure you research what friends are compatible for your pet and will actually make your pet happy. Not all birds want another bird, in the cage, but most will enjoy a friend or friends. Not all rabbits will be friends with other rabbits, but most of them enjoy company (neutered of course). Fish, even, enjoy other fish in the tank with them. Certain species really are better with more than one, such as cats and ferrets.

What Does This Mean?

It is intimidating to be a pet owner regardless of your sight. It can be more intimidating if you're not sure you can adequately care for your pet because of your sight. There are tools and options to help you adequately care for your friend. Don't be afraid to ask for help from specialists. Have a good relationship with your veterinarian, with people who can and will help if you need it and have a good understanding of your pet before you purchase/acquire your pet.

VI/Blind Tools

I have talked a bit about the various tools I utilize on a regular basis with my visual impairment. While I do have access to quite a few VI/Blind tools, I don't have access to all of them. I will discuss, in-depth, the ones that I use and gloss over the ones I don't use but know exist. There are tools for various parts of the home as well as various daily activities.

Mobility



One of the first things I wanted to do, when I lost my vision, was to be able to go out and about. Being stuck in your own house is awful. Having to ask people to guide you to places is also quite demoralizing. Depending on the person's VI/Blind, there are different tools available for mobility.

Blind Stick: White Cane

Blind sticks come in different lengths, styles, and tip styles. Blind sticks are typically measured based upon your height, your stride length, and the manner in which you use your stick. I have a giant rollerball stick, but I do have ends for tapping and bumping.

Roller Sticks



Roller sticks are typically telescoping or folding sticks that are marked with white and red over the stock. There is a hook at the bottom, which is what you attach your roller ball to. There are different styles and types of rollers. I use a giant roller ball; which lasts me about 8 months.

Roller ball sticks are utilized by holding the blind stick, by the handle, in your hand and using your wrist to flick the stick side to side. As the ball rolls across the ground the user will feel bumps, obstacles, and uneven ground. It takes a bit of time to get used to understanding where you feel the uneven tile to where you need to step over it.

Roller sticks will definitely give you strong wrist and arm muscles. Beyond the constant motion, your hands/arms/wrists pick up the sensations and vibrations created by the ball. For example, I can tell when

the bricks change direction or when we've changed from big bricks to small ones. You can usually tell when you're getting to a place with overgrown trees because the tiles become gritty and unstable.

The sound from your roller ball rolling across the ground will also tell you many things. For example, I can hear when there's a pole coming or an opening to my left or my right because the echo sounds different. A stick is a quick and easy thing to learn to use and it doesn't take much effort to get out of the house with.

In order to maintain the stick, you need to replace the balls regularly, wipe the stick down to keep it clean and dirt free, and make sure you don't leave it outside, in the weather. If you do come across an obstacle, stop immediately so as to not bend your stick. If you have a telescoping stick, do not telescope it closed while the stick is wet as you may cause it to rust.

Tapping Sticks



These sticks are similar to roller sticks in that they can come in telescoping or folding and are marked the same way. The end is the same with a hook or a screw to attach the pointed edge.

Tapping sticks work in a very similar way to roller sticks except that you bounce them on the ground in front of you and use the echo-location aspect far more. Tapping sticks will not always tell you when there's uneven tile but they're efficient for locating obstacles and the tapping is far more reliable for sound locations.

Tapping sticks require the same sort of training as roller sticks, are quick and easy to learn and quick and easy to get out of the house with. They require the same basic maintenance as roller sticks. The points will need replaced regularly, depending on how you use the stick.

Smart Sticks/Shoes

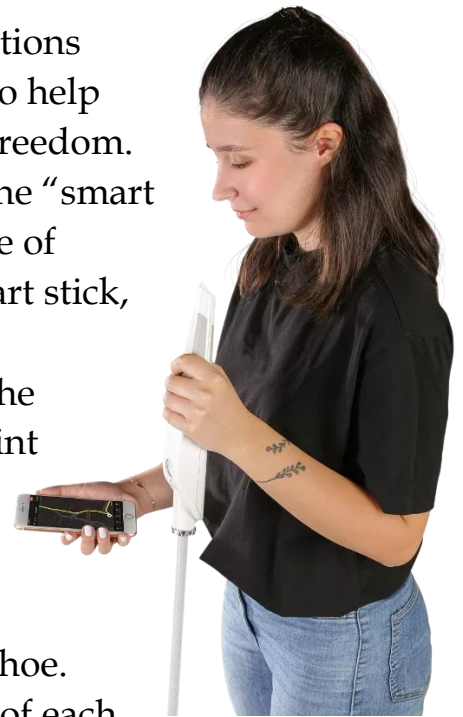


There are a variety of options coming out, every day, to help vi/blind have mobility freedom. One of these options is the “smart stick.” There are a couple of different varieties of smart stick, and they work slightly differently. The idea of the smart stick is that the stick “sees” 1m around it’s ocular point and indicates to the app in the user’s phone if there are obstacles etc. Many vi/blind utilize voice over via a bone conduction headset, so an app would be no problem.

Another possible option to come out recently is the smart shoe. The shoe contains a waterproof ultrasonic sensor at the tip of each shoe; which sends vibrations or makes noises to signal obstacles. This system, reportedly, can detect obstacles further away than a blind stick and can help you avoid being rammed by your own stick. Yes, that happens and causes bruises.

Sadly, the prices of both of these are very high: between \$4,000 and \$8,000. Most insurance companies do not cover the cost of these objects. I have not personally tried either of these objects. I feel the shoes could easily be confused in busy places and the stick seems a bit unwieldy.

Courtesy of WEWALK



Guide Dog



If you weren’t already aware, I acquired a guide dog, in December 2021. It’s been a journey to get to know and trust my guide dog, and likewise for him to know and trust me. You can find the whole story [here](#).

Guide dogs allow the vi/blind to go places the stick is incompatible for: sand/beach, grass/hiking, anything uneven where the stick would get stuck. Guide dogs are also great for guiding around obstacles, especially in busy places like a market. They find doors, seats, crosswalk poles, cross-walks, just about anything. Guide dogs will pick up

something you've dropped and stop you from trying to walk a place that you simply cannot go.

There are tremendous downsides or consequences to having a guide dog that may not be for everyone. Your guide dog needs fed, walked, played with, groomed, vaccinated, and otherwise cared for. This is a massive responsibility, which should not be taken lightly. Guide dogs are living creatures, which might seem obvious, but they do not always function how you might expect. A guide dog very well might chase a goose. They are trained not to do this, but they are also a dog.

Leaving the house is also an ordeal with a guide dog. You must get the lease and harness on your guide dog. You must pack a treat bag, foldable water bowl, and perhaps a clicker. You need your travel blind stick and identification that he is in fact a guide dog. I tend to carry his medical information with me because if something happens, someone with sight can help Basco instead of delaying medical attention.

While walking with a stick will take up one hand, walking with a guide dog means one hand is always busy, sometimes two. When you have the stick, you can lean it against something while you tie your shoes, dig in your bag, put something in your cart, etc. You cannot let go of your guide dog. You might put the leash around your wrist to be able to use both hands, but it is not the same freedom as with a stick.

All of that being said, in my experience, I choose to take Basco (my guide dog) instead of my stick 90% of the time. People tend to move when they see us coming, which doesn't always happen with my stick. I, also, find it more comforting to know that I don't have to feel for obstacles or hunt for a seat on the bus.