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It's a common quandary, especially in older homes: One or more rooms lacks ample artificial light because of an absence of overhead fixtures. Making matters worse, that same room may be short on outlets, requiring you to use extension cords or power strips to accommodate your only mode of lighting: table and floor lamps.

Sure, you could use brighter bulbs in those lamps or install an expensive window or skylight to bring in the natural rays of the sun. But how do you see better at night, and why should every light fixture require a lumen-robbing shade?

Time to adopt a can-do spirit by thinking can lights, otherwise known as recessed lights.

These fixtures take several forms. Can lights include a hollow metal can inside which a separate bulb is housed. A can-less model is a surface-mounted fixture that includes an LED light. Traditional cans are installed within a hole made in the ceiling and send ample concentrated light downward to a broad area (via a floodlight) or a more narrow space (via a spotlight).

Unlike chandeliers, track lights, lighted ceiling fans or other overhead fixtures, can lights don't protrude downward or rob ceiling space; the lights you see are flush with the ceiling's surface for greater spatial efficiency and provide more illumination (depending on the aperture size) because they don't use a shade. And they're controlled with a traditional wall switch or dimmer switch with no cord or plug to fuss with -- necessarily uniform -- illumination across a space, especially with recent advances in LED lights. Additionally, in space with easy access above the ceiling, installation can be relatively easy and inexpensive," says Meyer, noting that the fixtures themselves start at only around \$20 each.

"I recommend recessed lights whenever possible to homeowners, as they can change the way your space is seen, improve the appearance of furnishings and make visitors feel more welcome without knowing why because the light is out of their normal field of vision," says [Robin Wilson, CEO of and designer with Robin Wilson Home in New York City](#). "More options are available in the market today at varied prices, and they don't require extensive renovation or insulation due to the availability of safer LED lights, which don't heat up ceiling spaces like halogen or incandescent bulbs do." When deciding where to place the lights and how many to install, "think about exactly what you want to illuminate," suggests Meyer. "Are there particular features like artwork that you'd like to highlight? Are you concerned about illuminating evenly on the floor?"

To help, draw out your lighting scheme on paper and consider proper uniform distance between recessed fixtures.

"In a kitchen or hallway, I suggest placing these lights 4 to 6 feet apart with a wide aperture to allow a wash of light. In a living room or bedroom, you might select a mixture of wide and narrow aperture lights chosen based on the task," Wilson says.

Leslie Saul, a Cambridge, Massachusetts-based architect, cautions not to use "too many recessed lights in a room, as it makes the space look commercial and can make your elegant room's ceiling look like Swiss cheese."

Also, avoid installing recessed lights in rooms with exposed beams or an impermeable surface, "as the installation can be costly if not downright impossible," notes Davis.