

iPads May Help Those With 'Low Vision' Read Better

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Nov. 12, 2012 -- iPads and other tablets with backlit screens may allow millions of people with "low vision" to read faster and easier, a new study suggests.

Low vision is an umbrella term for people who still have trouble reading, watching TV, or performing other daily activities despite glasses, contact lenses, medication, or even surgery. For people in this situation, the only options left are often magnifying glasses and low-vision aids, many of which are bulky and not that easy to use.

The new study shows that iPads, Kindles, and other backlit tablets may allow some people to read faster and more comfortably.

According to the findings, readers read faster on the iPad 2 than the newspaper or printed article. This improvement was most pronounced among people who had low vision in both eyes.

Contrast Counts

The backlight boosts contrast sensitivity or the ability to see an object stand out from its background. Many people with low vision lose this ability. The magnified font and backlight allows them to improve their reading ability and comfort.

iPads can benefit most everyone with low vision, age-related macular degeneration, and diabetic eye disease, says Dr. Mark Fromer, MD, an ophthalmologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. "These devices create contrast between the letters and the background so they can read more easily -- without magnifiers."

"The 18-point font size and the contrast allow them to pick up the shape of the letters much easier than standard print," Dr. Fromer says.

They also beat the alternatives, vision aids, which can run as high as \$3,000 and are generally not covered by insurance. iPad 2s cost around \$400.