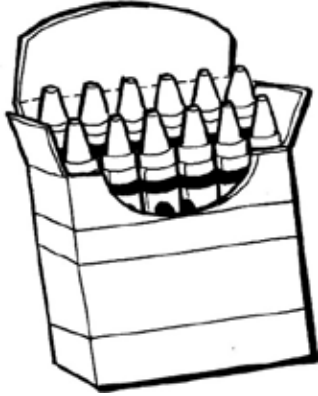


Responding to Color as We Age

This material is adapted from Purdue Extension and the Indiana Extension Homemaker's Association. The colors we choose to decorate our homes or wear affects what we appear to see, our emotions and even our safety.



Color is the first thing we notice about something. (The shape of the thing is the second). We use color to identify and group things. We make buying decisions based on color. We wear the colors of our memberships. For example, Harley Davidson owners are most often garbed in a uniform of a black vest and blue jeans, and United States Marines are proud to wear their iconic dress blues. Color used in package design can change the perceived value of what's inside. Color can cause a product to stand out from its competitors on store shelves. Color has the ability to change our mood.

We “See color” when light interacts with our eyes. Color lives in the brain, and the doorway is the retina in the eye. Without light, we cannot see color. If you ever had your Colors Read in the 1990's (Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter) it probably supported clothing color choices you were already making because your “colors” made you feel happier and more positive. Even if our hair gets grayer, whether you have a warm or cool complexion does not change over time. Your favorite colors to wear remain the same over time, but how light or dark your color choice does vary over time.

Responding to Color

There is no color without light. Light quality is cool (CFL and fluorescent tubes), warm (incandescent) or balanced (LEDs). The quality of light causes us to favor a color in one situation and dislike it in another.

Response varies with age. What was your favorite color as a child may not be your favorite now. Our color preferences will change as we grow and gain life experience. In a study by Joe Hallock, color preferences change over time.

Favorite Color by Age Group in US

0-18 years - Blue, Green, Red, Orange, White

19-24 – Blue, Orange, Purple, Green, Black

25-35 – Blue, Purple, Green, Orange, Red, Black

36-50 – Blue, Purple, Yellow, Green, Black, Red

50-69 – Blue, Purple, Yellow, Orange, Grey, Black, Red

70+ - Blue, White

Least Favorite Color by Age Group

Brown, Purple, Orange, Yellow

Brown, Orange, Yellow, Purple, Grey, Green

Orange, Brown, Purple, Yellow, Grey, White

Orange, Grey, Green, Brown, Purple, Yellow

Grey, Yellow, Brown, Purple, White

Orange, Brown, Purple, Blue

Colors have positive and negative responses. The same color will be used in one situation and rejected in another. To use yellow as an example, it is considered a cheerful color, but can also causes anxiety.

Here is a little exercise for you. The next time you are in your grocery store, take a look at how color is used in breakfast cereal packaging. What types of colors are used on cereals for kids, and what color schemes dominate adult cereal packaging? Flip through a seed or gardening catalog. What colors of flowers or shrubs draw your eye? When driving through a neighborhood which house colors are most appealing to you?

What Colors are Easier for Seniors to See?

Vision **yellows** with age. Older eyes are less able to distinguish the difference between **blues** and **greens**. Do not limit yourself to color choices that are mostly **blue, green** or another “cool” color. Warm colors like red and yellow may be a better choice!

Color-vision problems in the blue-yellow spectrum affects 45 percent of people in their mid-70s, and that proportion rises to two-thirds by the time people reached their mid-90s. The problem is not fixable with glasses. Few people have problems with the red-green spectrum. Can we restore our old color vision? Cataract surgery can make major difference because it replaces lenses in the eyes, clearing away the yellowish film.

Changes in color vision can also be a sign of significant medical problems, such as **diabetes**. If you notice changes in your color vision, and it's happening rapidly, that should be a warning flag for you to get your **blood sugar** tested and see an eye doctor to see if you have retinal damage.

How Do We Respond to Color in Everyday Life?

Color can affect our emotions/feelings and energy levels. Colors can stimulate, suppress, excite, calm and generally influence the way we think. You have probably had the experience of walking into a room and not feeling very comfortable.

5 Colors You Can Use to Liven Up an Older Adult's Home

1. Yellow

Warm colors like yellow and gold make seniors feel comfortable and secure. Using a shade of yellow in a senior's home can create a joyful living environment, raise alertness, and inspire creativity. Try painting the walls an inviting golden shade, or use bright yellow accent pillows in the living room to create a cozy ambiance. Don't go overboard with warm, yellow shades, as monochromatic color palettes can make seeing difficult for seniors with impaired vision.

2. Blue

Studies suggest elderly people tend to gravitate toward the color blue. This isn't surprising, as blue is a calming color that can relieve tension. Choose a classic pastel shade of blue, as it can fill a room with a soothing atmosphere. Light colors can make rooms feel wider and ceilings feel higher. Painting a room a pastel blue shade can make the living space feel relaxing and wide open. Buying a light blue sofa or bedding may have a similar effect.



3. Green

Green is another color that has a calming effect for seniors. The right shade of green can promote healing, security, and balance. As seniors tend to find light shades more relaxing than darker colors, choose a tranquil, pastel green that evokes scenes of nature and brighter shades of green.

4. Lavender

If you like purple shades, choose a rich lavender hue. The shade should be light enough to create a calming, meditative atmosphere, but dark enough that adults with impaired vision can enjoy it. Lavender is perfect for bedrooms, and it pairs well with dark wood furniture and cream-colored accents. Don't create color schemes with too much contrast, as it can strain the eyes. Instead, choose one defining color, like lavender, then surround it with appealing neutral shades.

5. Orange

Orange is a dominant color, and it can be overpowering when used on walls. However, it's a cheerful, friendly hue, and it's great when used as an accent color in our homes. Spice up bland, colorless rooms with a few orange accessories. Purchase orange throw pillows for an off-white sofa, or buy a painting of a bright orange sunflower. These little touches can make a room more welcoming, which is the main goal when sprucing up your home. Orange is the perfect color for sociable seniors. To reflect their personality.

Color Tips to Try



To prevent falls, use colored tape or paint the edge of the steps to show changes in ground level. Or paint the treads and risers contrasting colors. If outdoors, consider fluorescent tape on step edges. Using colored tape helps you see hazards better.

For medication safety, be aware of colored labels on prescriptions to help identify instructions for taking medication. Red, Yellow or Green print offers critical information.

Choose colors in your home that help you relax or feel energized, depending on your mood. Kitchen colors may not appeal in your bedroom.

In dim light or winter darkness, color code your keys to help find the correct one quickly.

At mealtime, choose to fill your plate with a variety of colors to appeal to your appetite and help maintain a healthy lifestyle.

My Plate

