Hadley

Shopping with Vision Loss

Presented by Ricky Enger

**Ricky Enger:** Shopping, whether you love it or just want to get it over with, you might be wondering how to approach it when you can't easily see what's on the shelf. In this episode, Lisa Salinger and Tiffany Mpofu join us as we discuss strategies for making shopping efficient and enjoyable. I'm Ricky Yager, and this is Hadley Presents. Welcome to the show. Wow, this is exciting.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Yes, it is.

**Lisa Salinger:** It's good to be here. I'm definitely in the, I love shopping. Well, I guess it depends on the circumstances.

**Ricky Enger:** That's actually a good way to introduce ourselves. So, we'll start with you, Tiffany. Let's put a name to a voice and tell us how you feel in general about shopping.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Yes, I'm Tiffany Mpofu, and I love shopping. Listen, there's nothing like a good shoe in a good deal.

**Ricky Enger:** And Lisa, how about you?

**Lisa Salinger:** I'm not terrible about having a lot of possessions, but having said that, I'm one of those people that feels like you can never have too many bags. I enjoy shopping. I would rather shop online, I think because I can take all the time I want to read if it's food ingredients or product care reviews, all kinds of things like that.

**Ricky Enger:** And I think I'm somewhere in the middle. So, I love shopping too. I love going online, reading all the ingredients or getting a description of the clothing item, but I also don't mind walking around in a store if it's the right day and I'm in the right mood. There's nothing like walking by the deli and going, oh, that smells good. I want to go get whatever that is. Or trying on shoes like Tiffany or feeling the texture of a piece of clothing and saying, yeah, that might be stylish, but there's no way I want that. Or vice versa. So, for all of us, shopping is fun to some degree, and really, there's no wrong way to shop or to think about shopping. The only wrong way is to do it in such a way where you feel frustrated or you feel overwhelmed, and you start to dread it. So, I think that figuring out that best approach is why we're here and just kind of taking into account how people want to approach it, what they like, what they don't like. And for some people they don't like technology much but still have to get some shopping done. So, if you don't like technology, are there some ways that you can approach this that don't require too much technology, but you can still get what you need to do done.

**Tiffany Mpofu**: And that is going to be getting shopping assistance from a store employee. You would call ahead to ask for assistance and schedule a time for your shopping trip and find out, especially when it comes to grocery shopping, find out when the store is going to be less crowded. Usually, mornings are less crowded than the weekends or evenings.

**Ricky Enger:** I know produce is one of those things that people can be really picky about. I want the best produce or even expiration dates on milk. I've been in situations where someone puts something in the cart and it's expiring that day. So, it's like asking those questions, right? Yes.

**Lisa Salinger:** I usually shop through Instacart, and I love trying new things. So, I get one or two items, and I find the boxes, or the packaging and I think, what the heck is this? What did I order? And then I've got to go through my list. But if you're in person, touching it before it goes in your cart is really helpful. You can also shop with friends or family members. Maybe you can get a volunteer shopper through a blind association, a church, or a civic organization. The nice thing I think about shopping with someone you get to know in a volunteer situation is they can kind of learn what your tastes are. So maybe they know that you love fruit and they, oh, they have a big promotional display with a lot of fruit. I also think one of the most helpful and considerate things you can do for the person who is helping you shop and for yourself too, I guess for that matter, is to make a list, but make it in a format that's accessible for the person who is helping you. So maybe you write it on a computer, and you print it, or maybe you have large print supplies, and you make a large print list because if they can see the whole picture, you're not having to backtrack constantly. And with some of the stores being as big as they are, that's kind of a major undertaking.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** And I also wanted to add that checking your senior center can also be a way to find a volunteer to help with shopping as well. But with the grocery list, for instance, using large print and using line paper can help, or even using a different color of paper like yellow to give that contrast between the marker and the paper so that it's a bit easier to see using a bold tip marker. And actually, we do have a workshop called taking notes that has some really great tips about taking notes or making lists.

**Ricky Enger:** So that's a really good point. Tiffany is having your grocery list in a format that's accessible to you as well as the person that you're shopping with. So, if you're writing in large print, both of you will be able to see it if you do have some sight still and the person with you does as well, if you have a voice recorder, you can do that. So, you're kind of going through marking things off and maybe you've printed out something for the person that you're with. Also, what about looking at prices on things? If you're in person, I know that it can get kind of awkward if you're with someone that you don't know especially, and that discussion of money comes up and you feel like you're asking every 30 seconds or so. And how much is that? Are there ways that you can get that information if you're in person, maybe it is asking the person that you're with. Are there other ways too?

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Yeah, using a magnifier to view labels and price tags can be a great way to get that information. And also too, another type of maybe hands-free situation is to put a cord connected to a lanyard or a cord to place around your neck so that as you're picking up items, your hands are kind of free, and you can use your magnifier to view labels and price tags.

**Ricky Enger:** That's really great. And we do have workshops on different types of magnifiers too. And we'll put that in the show notes.

And one thing we didn't talk about when it comes to doing this without technology is that not everywhere, but in some places, there are stores that will allow you to just call on the phone and place your order. Some of them will deliver, and for some of them you'll have to arrange transportation to go and pick it up. But with the apps that we're about to talk about, we're going to dive into technology a little bit. That's not the only way to get a nice big bulk order without having to walk around with someone against some of those stores. It's worth calling to ask, do you provide this service?

**Lisa Salinger:** And sometimes it's the stores you don't expect to have it. In one of the places where I lived, there was a little mom and pop shop that delivered, and that was really helpful.

**Ricky Enger:** So, we keep mentioning apps in a roundabout way. I know that we all tend to use them, and it's no surprise we are all tech people and not everyone is. But maybe if you are listening and you're comfortable using technology, or maybe that is actually the motivation for learning your technology, getting a little better with using it to shop. I think it helps to know what tools are available for that and kind of how they work. So, I think we can start then with grocery shopping apps. So, there are multiple things we can do with technology outside these apps, but we might as well talk about those first. I know that shipped is one of them and they own Target or Target owns them or something, but they do provide things outside Target too. So, there are multiple stores that shipped will let you do. There's Instacart, there's Walmart Grocery, there's a few others. Tiffany, what do you tend to use?

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Actually, I use both Shipped and Instacart just because they have different stores that I like to shop from. So, for Shipt, my local grocery store here is Meyer, so I would use Ship for Meyer and then Instacart for Sam's Club. I also use DoorDash because they do have a grocery section just for some quick things, not to do a huge grocery hall, but if I just need a few items, I'll use DoorDash as well.

**Ricky Enger:** And Lisa, I think you tend to use Instacart most, right?

**Lisa Salinger:** I do. I have used Shipt, but I find in my area, Instacart offers me access to 50 some stores I think and Shipt has about seven. So, I can get the wholesale clubs, I can get a lot of variety. Tiffany made a good point about ordering through DoorDash because you can also order groceries through Uber Eats and now you can order restaurant delivery through Instacart. So, I feel like there is some merging there.

**Ricky Enger:** And I think it depends on the area that you're in too. So here Shipt probably has just as many stores and some of them are unique to Shipt and vice versa with Instacart. But in some areas, like with you Lisa, it's clear that Instacart is probably the better pick because it is one-stop shopping, so to speak.

**Lisa Salinger:** Yeah, and I would say consider all your options because I've had discussions with people before about Instacart, just as an example. This could apply to any of them, and they say, oh, I hate the app. I'd never use it. But I love using the computer. I don't think I've ever gone to Instacart on my computer. I always do it on my phone. And so, if one really isn't resonating with you, you can try others.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** That is so true because for me, when I do my online shopping, I love using the computer because my screen is larger. I can get the items as large as I need to see the labels and to read the nutritional facts and all of that kind of stuff. So yeah, that's really true.

**Ricky Enger:** And you bring up a good point, Tiffany, which is that it's not just about adding the stuff to your cart. You can access other information beyond just what is available in the store and how much it costs. You can get that nutritional info or the ingredients list or even how to prepare some of that stuff. I know you do this a lot, Lisa too.

**Lisa Salinger:** Yeah. How long do you microwave this or that? And the other thing is you might consider getting one of these apps even if you never spend a dime on it because you could look through and see what they have. And I use mine as a shopping list of sorts. So, I know I have some things I need to get from Costco, and I have some things I need to get from Giant, which is my local supermarket. And so, I have two different quote carts going in Instacart, and if I think of something I need, I can just add it. But let's say someone calls you and says, “Hey, do you want to go shopping today?” I can be there in half an hour. Well, if you've already made a list, then you don't have to do the Hari scurry thing. And the app is just another way.

**Ricky Enger:** You for some reason decide that shopping from your recliner is still not the thing you want to do, and you want to go out. I think that technology can still be useful in those situations. Like Lisa gave the example, you have gotten your list together. Even if someone is coming and going to go shopping with you, you've kind of made your list in Instacart. Are there other ways that technology can be used if you're shopping in person? Tiffany, can you talk about maybe things that you've done with your smartphone? I know you've taken your smartphone when shopping, and there's probably a lot of ways that you use it when you're in person.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** For the most part, what I do is use a magnifier app on my phone. So, when I go to the store, I'll pull out my phone. And what's great about it, I don't have a thousand devices with me, I just have my phone. So, then I'm able to read the sizes of clothing, I can know what the price is and all of that great stuff.

**Lisa Salinger:** I feel like my use of technology starts when I get my groceries because I've got seven cans and which ones are the chickpeas in which ones are the mandarin oranges. And so, I use a variety of apps. Probably the one I use most is Seeing AI. And just another quick aside, Hadley does have workshops on how to use this app, and you can use it for a number of things. And one of them is to identify products.

**Ricky Enger:** Speaking of identifying products, we've gotten a lot of calls over the past year or so on Meta glasses. So, you could use these in the store or when you get home, one thing that you can do with them is hold up a product and ask Meta, what product am I holding or what am I holding? And it will use a combination of trying to recognize the logo or maybe it sees some text on the packaging. So, it's kind of putting all of those things together to make an educated guess about this is probably what you're holding. They also will give you the ability to call a human to look through the camera, whether that is be my eyes, who can do that on a volunteer basis, or whether it's Aira, which is a paid service. And you've got someone who's kind of trained to work with blind and low vision people on the other end of the phone, and you can have them essentially walk virtually alongside you, or you just call them briefly when you need something through those hands-free meta glasses.

I do think it's important though. We've talked a lot about these different things that you can do using your magnifier to look at a price tag or use Seeing AI to scan a barcode or read the text or use Meta glasses to identify stuff. Those things can work really well. I do think it's important to practice with them a bit and kind of think through your scenario. Because often when I'm talking to people, and I bet the two of you have had calls like this too, we say, yes, the meta glasses are really helpful, or seeing AI is really helpful and the person's getting very excited. This is going to give me so much freedom and so much independence. And then when we sort of walk through the scenario and the person's like, so I can walk in and I've got 40 items on my list and meta can help me find all of these things, technically yes. But if you're thinking about asking Meta what am I holding, and you're doing that 40 times at a minimum, is that okay for you? Do you feel like you are having fun? Do you feel like you're empowered doing that, or does that become overwhelming in its own way?

**Lisa Salinger:** And there is the whole thing too that it does sometimes get things wrong. I had a can, and I asked the meta glasses what I was holding, and it told me I was holding beef stew. Well, I will never buy beef stew in a can. It was another equally junky food. It was a can of corn beef hash. And I did get that when I asked again, but when it said beef stew, I thought, oh, I bet it's going off the picture. I bet this is the hash. But in the store if it says it's beef stew, you don't really know unless you do it more than once. And just a reminder to those who have never had sight, I can't tell you how many times I get really awful results from the meta glasses or seeing ai, and then I have to remind myself, oh yeah, you have no light on in here. You need to turn on the light so that the camera has something to work with while you're identifying your groceries.

**Ricky Enger:** Yes, don't keep your camera in the dark. So, a lot of what we focused on is grocery shopping, and I think that's because it's one of those that happens every few days, whether you wish it did or not, but it's definitely not the only kind of shopping that we do. So I do want to just touch a little bit on those other kinds of shopping, like Tiffany, when your closet is feeling a little bit empty and there's that spot for just one more pair of shoes, how can we approach clothing shopping because that's its own thing where there might be questions of style as well as questions of price and color and just finding something in all these racks and racks of clothing. So, what are some ways that we can do that sort of shopping still in a way that's going to work for us?

**Tiffany Mpofu:** Sure. Yeah. One way, just like grocery shopping is to call ahead for a personal shopper. So, if you have a favorite retail store or maybe a new store you want to try, just call them and ask if you can request a personal shopper and schedule a time. And so that person can help even describe different pieces of clothing, like the pattern or the color. One time before I went out shopping and I tried it on and asked how it looked on me, and they were like, oh, it looks nice.

**Ricky Enger:** Yeah, I love that approach, especially if you are thinking, yeah, but I don't really have anyone to go with me. These stores. Actually, personal shopping is a service that isn't just for people who are having trouble seeing things in the same way they used to, or maybe you've never seen anything. So, my husband likes to say about himself, he's like, I'm not just visually impaired. I'm style impaired. And I think that's true for a lot of people, regardless of who you are, it's a thing they enjoy doing and that's exactly what they're there for.

**Lisa Salinger:** I'm a little bit of a paranoid clothes shopper. You can have two pieces of clothing where the fabric feels identical and one of them looks great on you, and the other one shows every flaw, but they feel exactly the same. And so that's frustrating to me. So, what I've done, if I can, I try to shop with somebody. I know if I can't and I'm working with a personal shopper, I make sure to save my receipts, maybe label them, put them in an envelope until I can try on the clothes for someone whose opinion I trust. And so that's how I do that. The other thing is I have pants that are comfortable, and they work, and so I have the style number and the lot number written down, and when they die or if my size changes, I can just go online because I have that info. Now, I don't feel like that works for all your clothes shopping. You do want things that look different, but for a lot of the staples, that's a good possibility too.

**Tiffany Mpofu:** And I love that idea, Lisa, because I'm vertically challenged. So, when I find a really great pair of pants where the cut is nice and it just fits perfectly, having that information to go online and purchase more of those is really helpful.

**Ricky Enger:** Well, this has been a lot of fun, and I think we could talk about shopping all day because again, it turns out we enjoy it. But I hope that for even those of you who don't love shopping, maybe you've picked up some tips and tricks from us, and regardless of how you choose to do it, whether it's online, whether it's with someone, whether it's calling that senior center to see if they're volunteers or some combination of all of those, I think it's great to have as many tools in your toolbox as you can. We've mentioned a number of different things, and you'll find those in our show notes. So, some links to Hadley workshops on Grocery Shopping and Taking Notes and Seeing AI and all of those things, you’ll find there.

Well, thank you both so much for spending a little time talking about shopping. I'm suddenly in the mood for a new pair of shoes, so maybe at the end of this recording I'm going to make that happen. It's been wonderful. Thank you both again and thank you all for listening.

**Tiffany Mpofu**: Thanks, Ricky.

**Lisa Salinger:** Thank you.

**Ricky Enger:** Got something to say? Share your thoughts about this episode of Hadley Presents or make suggestions for future episodes. We'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at podcast@hadleyhelps.org. That's P-O-D-C-A-S-T@hadleyhelps.org or leave us a message at 847-784-2870. Thanks for listening.