

# Overhead Lighting Buying Guide

Bring general lighting to any room. Learn more about overhead lighting construction, types, style, and care.



Overhead lighting or ceiling lighting refers to any fixture that is attached to the ceiling. These types of lights offer top-level lighting, and effectively illuminate a fixed radius area below. This category includes many sizes, styles, and types. Common overhead lights are pendants, chandeliers, recessed lights, track lights, and flush and semi-flush lights. Due to its position in a room, overhead lighting casts a wide and highly illuminating glow, and is widely used for general lighting purposes. Overhead lighting can also be decorative, or spotlight certain features in a space. These types of lights help to establish a look or aesthetic for a room. Overhead lighting appears best when used alongside wall lighting and lamps for balanced illumination. In any setting, a mix of light sources at each height level will offer the lighting best aesthetic.

## Overhead Lighting Construction

### The Fixture



The principal overhead fixtures are chandeliers, pendants, recessed lights, track lights, and flush and semi-flush lights. As the types, sizes, and styles of overhead lights vary greatly, the fixture construction varies greatly as well. All ceiling lights will include a rod, chain, fitter, or trim that securely connects the fixture to the ceiling surface. Other common ceiling light features are:

- **Light canopy:** the light component that sits flush against the ceiling surface and covers the ceiling box. Canopies can be highly stylized or simple in design. The light canopy may also house a transformer in low voltage lights
- **Cage frame:** the main element of the fixture's design and shape, can include metal framing as well as glass panels
- **Glass panel:** acts as a fixture shade. Protects the bulb and inner housing of the fixture while allowing the bulb to illuminate the surrounding area. Can be crafted from seeded glass, transparent glass, translucent glass, tinted glass, or opaque glass
- **Glass holder:** Binds the panels, frame, and light source

Overhead lighting fixtures are crafted from a variety of metals, glasses, and plastic materials. The materials used to craft overhead lights depends largely on the application of the light, and the desired aesthetic. Chandeliers may use stylized metals, while recessed can lights may use high-grade plastic. Overhead lights can include fabric shades, though this is less common.

## The Bulb

Overhead lighting fixtures include models compatible with almost any type of bulb, including incandescent, LED, and Fluorescent bulbs. These types of fixtures often showcase exposed bulbs, a unique feature of overhead lighting. Ceiling lights with exposed bulbs may use stylized bulbs such as Edison or filament bulbs to achieve a particular look. Each bulb types carries unique advantages and disadvantages.

### Incandescent

- Pros: Emit the soft light tone we are used to seeing, inexpensive
- Cons: Need to be replaced often, use the most energy

### LED

- Pros: Energy saving, very long lives (up to 20 years)
- Cons: Expensive, color varies from traditional incandescent bulbs

### Fluorescent

- Pros: Use 90% less energy than incandescent bulbs, emit little heat, last 10x longer than incandescent bulbs
- Cons: Expensive, not dimmable, color varies from traditional incandescent bulbs, harsh color tone

## Silver Bowl

Silver bowl light bulbs have a metallic finish on their top half for a softer light. These bulbs appear well in overhead fixtures and can compensate for a missing dimmer.

## Soft Pink

Soft pink light bulbs are tinted with a light pink tone, to create a warm, ambient light. These lights are ideal in any setting where a more rosy, romantic ambiance is desired.

## Round Candelabra

Round candelabra bulbs are intended for use in open-bulb fixtures. These bulbs carry a sleek, modern look that contributes to the overall appearance of a room.

## Flame-Shaped Bulbs

Flame-shaped bulbs imitate the look of a small candle flame. These bulbs were originally used as replacements for candles in the early 20th century and can today add to a vintage aesthetic.

## Edison Bulb

The Edison bulb has become popularized in industrial or factory design. These heritage-style bulbs feature a slender shape with visible glowing filaments. Edison bulbs are expensive, not highly illuminating, and have short lives.

# Powering Your Overhead Light

Overhead lights are either low voltage or high voltage. High voltage lights, also known as line voltage lights, are more common in indoor setting. High voltage is defined at 120 volts. Low voltage is defined as 10V, 12V, or 24V. The wiring for overhead lights is often installed during construction of a home, and concealed above the visible ceiling surface, for an unobstructive appearance. Low and high voltage lights have unique benefits and deterrents, and each are best suited to particular applications.

## High Voltage

High voltage lights are defined as 120V. Most indoor overhead lights are high voltage, with exceptions. These types of lights do not require the use of a transformer. While transformers are commonly nested inside the fixture canopy in low voltage lights, they can influence the appearance of the light where it attaches to the ceiling.

- **Pros:** Same voltage as appliances, lower cost fixtures, bulbs, and installation
- **Cons:** Less energy efficient, high operating costs

## Low Voltage

Low voltage lights are defined at 10V, 12V or 24V. Low voltage fixtures are a modern option, and were not previously available. Low voltage lights include a low voltage fixture and a transformer or power pack. Transformers are commonly nested within the main body of the fixture and do not require special installation. Chandeliers and recessed can lights are commonly low voltage. Low voltage lights allow the use of smaller and more compact bulbs, making low voltage lights a preferred option with candelabra bulb chandeliers and small recessed lights.

- **Pros:** Safer than high voltage systems, more energy efficient, easier to install and adjust, allows for more bulb types and variations
- **Cons:** Requires compatible low voltage equipment (transformer), more expensive

**Note:** Always consult a professional lighting electrician before purchasing or installing overhead lights. This guide is not intended to take the place of a professional's best opinion or serve as a technical safety manual.

# Overhead Lighting Types



## Chandeliers

Chandeliers are often installed as showpiece lighting fixtures, making a bold decorative statement in any setting. Smaller chandeliers with a more subtle appearance are also available. Popular in formal dining rooms, foyers, and living rooms, chandeliers commonly include a canopy, chain, central body (otherwise known as the dish), arms, and bulbs. Chandeliers often have an ornate, intricate appearance, though simple, modern options are also available. Chandeliers can be high or low voltage. Low voltage chandeliers allow for smaller, more diverse bulb sizes. Chandeliers with crystal prisms further reflect and distribute light in a room.



## Pendants

Pendant lights include a rod or chain suspending the fixture housing and bulb at a designated distance from the ceiling. Typically 2 - 8 pendants are used together, spaced evenly along a ceiling surface for an even distribution of light in a specified area. Ideal for general, task, mood, and decorative lighting, pendant lights appear best when used to counterpoint a specific furnishing or feature. Pendant lights are commonly used above kitchen islands, dining tables, or work spaces. Smaller pendants are popular for use over compact task-oriented spaces, such as the kitchen sink.



## Flush Mount Lights

Flush mount lights attach directly to the ceiling, with no space between the ceiling surface and the main body of the fixture. These types of lights do not include a rod or chain. Flush mount lights are ideal in spaces with low ceiling heights, or to achieve a more casual, inconspicuous aesthetic. Flush mount lights are rarely decorative, and serve a primarily functional purpose.



## Semi-Flush Mount Lights

Semi-flush mount lights are similar to flush mount lights, with one notable difference. These types of lights include a rod or chain and are typically suspended 1' from the ceiling. Flush mount lights create the illusion of a larger, more open room by casting light upwards towards the ceiling, as well as down onto the room. Semi-flush lights offer a more stylized appearance than flush mount options, and can bring full illumination with decorative flair to a dining room, bedroom, or living room.



## Recessed Lights

Recessed lights are embedded into the ceiling, for a modern look and highly-illuminating general lighting. These types of lights are also referred to as high hats, downlights, or can lights, and generally measure between 3"-6" in diameter. Recessed lights include the light housing and a trim. The housing refers to the actual light fixture, which is situated inside the ceiling and holds the light bulb



and the trim. The trim is what is visible of the fixture to a person standing in a room with recessed lighting. Trim types include baffle, eyeball, wall wash, and shower. Trim type determines the appearance of a recessed light, and various trims are best-suited to unique uses. Recessed lights are commonly low voltage. While most recessed lights point directly towards the ground, directional models are also available and can be angled to highlight particular areas or features in a space.



## Track Lights

Track lighting refers to a method of lighting where individual fixtures are fixed along one continuous track apparatus. This type of lighting is defined by its concealed conductor, and includes individual spotlights attached to a mounted track. A current runs through the track, allowing flexible positioning of each fixture. Track lighting offers effective accent, task, and ambient lighting, and these types of lights may include straight or curved tracks, and pendant or compact fixtures.

# Overhead Lighting Style

## Contemporary

Contemporary fixtures feature sleek lines and straight-forward styling. Geometric shapes, clean finishes, and modern glass are trademark indicators of the contemporary look.

## Transitional

Transitional lights bridge the gap between traditional and contemporary styles, lifting elements from both new and timeless design for a unique aesthetic. These fixtures may include sleek lines with some decorative ornamentation, elegant curved frames, and light detailing.

## Traditional

Traditional fixtures draw upon time-honored motifs for their design. Traditional lights are highly ornamental, and may recall a vintage European aesthetic. Popular features in traditional design include frosted glass, curved frames, and antiqued bronze finishes.

## Rustic

Popular in country or quaint home design, rustic lighting integrates organic shapes, textures, and weathering for a warm, relaxed look with regained modern appeal.

## Craftsman

Craftsman lighting design mimics craftsman home design. Straight, simple lines, sharp angles, and contemporary materials are indicators of the craftsman style. Craftsman lights incorporate artistic hand-made style elements, such as painted finishings and seeded glass.

## Industrial

Contemporary industrial style mimics turn-of-the-century factory design, for a gritty, urban look. These lights use patinaed metals, vintage bulbs, and reclaimed motifs to achieve their signature aesthetic.

# Overhead Lighting Placement



## Choosing the Right Fixture for Every Ceiling Height

Consider ceiling height when selecting overhead lighting fixtures. Certain overhead lighting types are better-suited to certain ceiling heights. Choosing the appropriate overhead lights for your ceiling height not only adds to a more balanced aesthetic, but also helps to avoid injury from bumping into low-hanging fixtures:

- Flush mounts and recessed lighting are best for ceilings 8' tall and shorter
- Semi-flush mount lights are best for ceilings between 8' and 10' tall
- Pendant or chandelier lights are best for ceilings above 10' tall
  - Pendants or chandeliers over a table or kitchen island can be lower

## Lighting a Dining Table or Kitchen Island

- Pendants and chandeliers should hang 36"-48" above the dining table or kitchen island surface
- A well-sized chandelier should measure  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  the width of the dining table
- Restrict lighting above an island or dining table to 100 watts

## Spacing Overhead Lights

- Leave 12"-15" between either end of a kitchen island or table and overhead lights
- Evenly space pendant lights, increasing the distance between each fixture for larger lights, and decreasing the distance for smaller lights

## Overhead Lighting Care

- Always use a ladder or stepstool to access overhead lighting fixtures
- Consult an electrician or lighting professional with all installation and maintenance questions or concerns
- Opt for LED or energy efficient bulbs to reduce the frequency at which overhead light bulbs need to be replaced