RNIB

See differently

Dementia and Sight Loss

About this leaflet

This leaflet has useful information for anyone with dementia. You may also find this leaflet helpful if you're caring for someone with dementia.

As well as learning more about sight loss and dementia, you'll find a handy checklist on identifying sight loss and other information that will help you make the most of your sight.

If you have further questions after reading this leaflet, please do get in touch with us.

RNIB
0303 123 9999

How common is sight loss in people with dementia?

Sight loss affects an estimated 250,000 people with dementia in the UK and may be caused by:

- an eye condition, such as cataracts
- another health condition, such as stroke
- normal ageing of the eye
- the dementia itself.

If you have dementia, you may have visual difficulties (specifically problems with understanding what you are seeing and processing this information in the brain) but still have healthy eyes. These problems are caused by the effect of dementia on the brain.

Dementia conditions which may have an impact on vision are: Lewy body dementia, posterior cortical atrophy, Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia.

What are the signs?

If you have dementia, consider if you're having difficulty with:

- reading
- recognising people
- coping with bright light, low light or both
- finding things
- avoiding obstacles
- locating food on your plate
- seeing well with your current glasses.

Sight loss is typically under-diagnosed in people with dementia because one condition can mask or be mistaken for another.

A study into the prevalence of dementia and sight loss found nearly one-third of people with dementia also had significant sight loss. Almost half of the study participants could have their sight loss corrected by wearing up-to-date spectacle prescriptions.

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Sight loss or dementia?

You may find yourself behaving differently as a reaction to sight loss or while trying to make the most of your vision. Examples include:

- becoming withdrawn or uncommunicative
- being clumsy or falling more
- having visual hallucinations
- holding things up close
- feeling confused and disorientated
- being startled by noises or people approaching.

Some of the above may be due to dementia, but sight loss could be a contributory factor.

Charles Bonnet syndrome

Charles Bonnet syndrome (CBS) is common among people who have lost their vision from an eye condition, such as age-related macular degeneration, cataract, glaucoma or diabetic eye disease.

CBS causes people to see things that aren't there. These visual hallucinations can be distressing, but usually last between a year and 18 months, after which they become a lot less frequent.

There is currently no medical cure for CBS and it is important to ensure that the hallucinations are not caused by a mental health problem or a symptom of another disease or infection, or from a particular type of dementia.

What should I do?

If you have dementia, you should have your sight examined regularly. In Scotland the sight test is free and people over the age of 60 are recommended to be seen annually.

In the rest of the UK eye examinations are free for people over the age of 60 and people aged over 70 can be seen annually. You can be seen earlier if you have new symptoms or your optometrist recommends more frequent visits due to your general health or eye health.

Your optometrist can give advice about eye health and ensure that the correct glasses are worn at the right time.

If you're the carer of a person with dementia, he or she may not be able to tell you about changes to their sight. It is therefore vital to ensure that the person has regular sight tests.

FREE

NHS sight tests are free for people over the age of 60

What could help?

- Follow the three Cs: make sure glasses are always current, clean and correct.
- Make sure glasses fit well.
- Ensure good, even lighting to help reduce shadows.
- Reduce the risk of trips and falls.
- Use good colour contrast, especially for everyday activities.
- Having plain backgrounds, for example for walls, can be more helpful than patterned.
- When guiding the person indoors, give information about the people who are present and the environment.
- Ensure any medication, especially eye drops are taken.

The three Cs:

Make sure glasses are always:

Current

Clean

Correct

Get advice or more information from RNIB or Alzheimer's Society or complete the checklist overleaf and take this to the optometrist.

Identifying sight loss checklist

Please circle the most appropriate answer:

Date of your last eye examination		
If over 70, do you attend annually?	**Yes**	**No**
If under 70, do you attend every two years?	**Yes**	**No**
Is there a family history of eye problems?	**Yes**	**No**

Please give details:

Everyday vision

Have you stopped reading?	Yes	No
Are you struggling to see the television?	Yes	No
Are you finding it difficult to recognise people?	Yes	No
Do you knock over items at the table?	Yes	No
Do you constantly leave food on your plate?	Yes	No
Do you search for objects with your hands?	Yes	No

Mobility

Have you been tripping or falling more often?	Yes	No
Do you bump into furniture?	Yes	No
Do you overstep or are you more hesitant at kerbs or stairs?	Yes	No

Interactions

Do you repeatedly clean your glasses or ask other people to do it for you?	Yes	No
Do you get startled when you're approached unexpectedly?	Yes	No
Do you dislike or avoid going out on a sunny day?	Yes	No
Do you move objects close to your face or move your face close to objects?	Yes	No

If you, or the person you are caring for, are having difficulty in any of these areas, please see an optometrist for an eye examination as soon as possible.

Handy hints for visiting the optometrist

- Let the optometrist know that you have dementia.
- Take a list of your medication.
- Take your glasses with you.
- If there is a family history of eye problems, tell the optometrist.
- Take this leaflet and checklist with you.

Everyday living solutions

RNIB have many products for helping people with sight loss and dementia at home, including:

Liquid level indicator

Place the liquid level indicator on the side of your cup and it will beep or vibrate when the liquid is near the top.

Smart home devices

Devices like computers, smartphones and tablets have accessibility built in, also specialist suppliers of products designed for people with sight loss.

Talking watch

Radio controlled talking watches. Simply press the button to hear the time in a natural English voice.

Emporia AMPLi40 big button phone

This big button landline phone is designed to be easy to use, with features for people with sight and/or hearing loss, including one-touch memory buttons, SOS button and audio boost function.

Bumpons

Self-adhesive tactile rubber shapes for highlighting settings on cookers, microwaves, thermostats and remote controls.

For these and other products visit:
shop.rnib.org.uk and **meetadam.org**

RNIB provide:

- training for public and health and social care professionals (including optometrists)
- information services
- a broad range of support and care services for people with dementia and confirmed or suspected sight loss.

For more information contact:

RNIB

Telephone: **0303 123 1999**

Visit: **rnib.org.uk**

Other useful contacts:

Alzheimer's Society Dementia support

Call: **0333 150 3456**

VISION UK

Visit: visionuk.org.uk

Thomas Pocklington Trust

Visit: **pocklington.org.uk**

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RNIB Health and Social Care Training team

We deliver training and professional development opportunities to health and social care professionals. To find out more about the training we offer, contact us at:

Email: **HSCTrainingTeam@rnib.org.uk**
Phone: **0141 739 3683**

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