

# Dementia and sight loss



**R N I B**



See differently



**Alzheimer  
Scotland**  
Action on Dementia

## About this leaflet

This leaflet has useful information for anyone living with dementia or supporting 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**

**Alzheimer Scotland**

**0808 808 3000**

# How common is sight loss in people with dementia?

Sight loss affects an estimated 250,000 people with dementia in the UK. It 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 perception) but still have healthy eyes. These problems are caused by the effect of dementia on the brain.

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

# What are the signs of sight loss?

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.

# Research findings from PrOVIDe study (2016)

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

A recent study into the prevalence of dementia and sight loss found that 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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of people with  
dementia also had  
significant sight loss**

# Sight loss or dementia?

You may experience changes in your feelings and behaviours 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- becoming withdrawn or uncommunicative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 the impact of 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 quite distressing. At first they may happen quite often. However, everyone has a different experience of CBS, for some people the hallucinations may get less frequent over a few months and they may eventually stop, but for others the condition may continue for years.

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 should be seen annually.

In the rest of the UK the eye examination is free for people over the age of 60 and people aged over 70 can be seen annually.

Your optometrist can give advice about eye health, if your eyes need to be examined more often than annually and ensure that the correct glasses are worn at the right time

If you are supporting someone 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, but if you notice any new symptoms or have any concerns about their eyes, contact the optometrist to arrange an earlier appointment.

If you are unable to visit a high street practice an optometrist may be able to visit you at home and carry out an eye examination.





# Free

**In Scotland the sight test is free  
and people over the age of 60  
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# What could help?

- Follow the four Cs: make sure glasses are always Current, Clean, Correct and Comfortable.
- 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 four Cs:

Make sure glasses are always:

**Current**

**Clean**

**Correct**

**Comfortable**

**Get advice or more information from RNIB or Alzheimer Scotland, or complete the checklist overleaf and take this to the optometrist.**



# Making an appointment checklist

## 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 repeatedly 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 supporting, 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.
- Let the optometrist know when your last eye examination was.
- Take a list of your medication with you.
- Take your glasses with you.
- If there is a family history of eye problems, tell the optometrist.
- Consider taking someone with you. Ensure that you have this leaflet and checklist with you too.



# Everyday living solutions

RNIB has many products in its online shop 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

Increasingly devices like computers, smartphones, tablets and home devices have accessibility built in, or are available from 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.



## Bumpsons

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

## Swissvoice 2155 amplified cordless phone

- Easy to see telephone with four large photo memory buttons designed with sight loss and hearing loss in mind.
- Hearing aid-compatible.



For these and other products visit:  
**[shop.rnib.org.uk](http://shop.rnib.org.uk)** and **[meetadam.co.uk](http://meetadam.co.uk)**



## **RNIB and Alzheimer Scotland provide:**

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

## **For more information contact:**

### **RNIB Helpline**

Telephone: **0303 123 9999**

Visit: **rnib.org.uk**

### **Alzheimer Scotland**

Tel: **0131 243 1453**

Visit: **alzscot.org**

For support and information contact RNIB Helpline on **0303 123 9999**

Dementia Helpline on **0808 808 3000**

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**Alzheimer  
Scotland**  
Action on Dementia

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