# Vision and stroke: What impact could stroke have on your vision?

Voice-over: This podcast is brought to you by the RNIB Older People and Complex Needs team, RNIB ECLO team and RNIB eye health team. It is part of our vision and stroke series. The information in this podcast will be helpful for health and social care professionals and anyone who wants to know more about vision and stroke.

Linzi: Hello and welcome to RNIB’s Vision and Stroke podcast. I’m Linzi Sansum from RNIB’s Older People and Complex Needs team and today talking with me in this podcast will be Mrs. Stevie Johnson, the Clinical Lead in RNIB’s ECLOs team and Louise Gow, who is the Specialist Lead for RNIB’s eye health team. Hi Stevie and Louise.

Stevie: Hello!

Louise: Hello!

Linzi: So, today, we’ll be covering some key facts and statistics on stroke and vision and how stroke can affect vision. We hope this podcast will be helpful for health and social care professionals and anyone who wants to really know a bit more about vision and stroke.

Many of us know or are aware of some of the common signs of stroke and how stroke may impact on someone and these can vary from person to person. This all depends on what parts of the brain have been affected. For example, some of the common signs people may be aware of is weakness down one side of the body and speech possibly being affected – but we would like to highlight that vision can be affected by stroke and we’ll talk a little bit more about this today.

Stevie is going to give us some information about key facts in relation to stroke and vision. So, Stevie, over to you.

Stevie: Hello, everybody. First of all: just a reminder about what a stroke actually is. And a stroke is a blockage or a bleed in a blood vessel in the brain; this means that part of the brain becomes damaged due to lack of oxygen. There are more than 100,000 strokes in the UK each year and that is around one stroke every five minutes and around one in six men will have a stroke in their life and around one in five women and there are currently over 1.2 million stroke survivors in the UK and it’s important to remember that children can have strokes, too. Up to 60% of stroke survivors have problems with their vision as a result of their stroke. Some people may see some improvement in their vision up to six months after a stroke and, again, this is highly dependent on when the damage in the brain has happened, as well as the type of stroke suffered and any other existing health problems.

Unfortunately, for many people, especially those with loss of visual field, sight loss may be permanent.

It’s also important to talk about TIAs. TIA stands for Transient Ischaemic Attack and these can also sometimes be known as a mini stroke. They are the same as a stroke except that the symptoms last for less than 24 hours and what’s important to know about a mini stroke is that they can be seen as a warning sign and often full strokes can happen after a mini stroke.

So, if someone has a TIA, it means that they’re at greater risk of having a full stroke and that they should seek medical attention immediately.

Linzi: Thank you, Stevie, for those very interesting and important facts and really interesting to know that up to 60% of stroke survivors could have vision problems after a stroke.

Louise, would you like to tell us a little bit more about how vision might be affected by stroke? We know that this can depend on what parts of the brain can be affected and some people may already know about some of the well-known effects, which could be loss of half of the visual field or what a person can see to one side in both eyes, which is known as hemianopia.

But Louise, tell us a little bit more about other ways vision could be affected?

Louise: Yes, whilst the most well-known effect of stroke is the loss of visual field in some cases, as Linzi has said there, half the visual field in both eyes, your vision can be affected in several different ways, depending on which part of the brain is affected. Stroke can also damage the areas of the brain that cause eye movement, resulting in double vision, difficulty following movement, and loss of depth perception. This affects your ability to judge distances and speeds, for example. This can also affect how your brain processes visual information, such as recognising faces or naming objects or difficulty following the meaning when reading words that are printed.

Another possible processing issue after a stroke can be that you may not be aware of objects to one side because the brain is unable to process the information and this is known as visual neglect. For instance, you may only be aware of food on the right side of your plate and therefore leave food that’s on the left side of your plate.

After a stroke, it’s also possible to acquire dry eye, where the tear film is poor quality and cases irritation and soreness. You may also suffer with light sensitivity and may need to wear glare shields, and finally, some people develop visual hallucinations.

Visual hallucinations are also known as Charles Bonnet Syndrome or CBS. These hallucinations are just visual; therefore, you cannot smell, touch or hear them, and they’re not connected with psychosis. They can be simple or elaborate with details and images that are scary, or they might be images that you enjoy seeing. But nonetheless, it can be connected with stroke and often this is overlooked by the medical practitioners when you are assessed initially.

Linzi: Thank you, Louise, that’s some really, really interesting facts there, especially about judging distance and speeds and how some people may also see some hallucinations and that can obviously be related to other things as well but, as you point out, if they’re specifically visual hallucinations, that may also be something that can occur after a stroke.

We would just like to point out that, in our future podcasts, we hope to discuss a little bit more about vision and stroke and what more could be done to help the person in their day-to-day life, or who may be involved in that person’s care – but thank you so much to Stevie and Louise for sharing all of their information today and thank you for listening to our first podcast on vision and stroke.

Voice-over: If you found this helpful, listen to our other podcasts in our vision and stroke series. We also have information and support online relating to vision and stroke on the RNIB webpages. You can find this information by typing ‘stroke’ into the search bar at the top right-hand side of the RNIB webpage: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk). For more information about working with people with sight loss and complex needs, go on to the RNIB website and type ‘complex needs’ in the search box. You can also call the RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999. Thank you for listening.