



# Dementia and Sight Loss

**RNIB** Supporting people  
with 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 Scotland**  
**0141 772 5588**

**Alzheimer Scotland**  
**0131 243 1453**

# 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 perception) 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 recent 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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significant sight loss**

# 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- becoming withdrawn or uncommunicative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 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 should be seen annually.

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

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# 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.

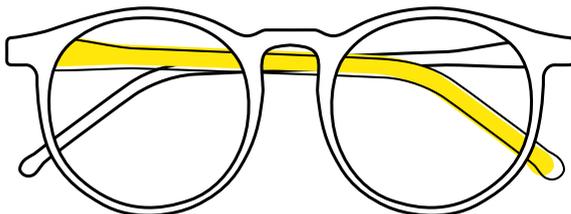
# The three Cs:

Make sure glasses are always:

**Current**

**Clean**

**Correct**



Get advice or more information from  
RNIB Scotland or Alzheimer Scotland  
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 60, do you attend annually?

Yes

No

If under 60, 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.

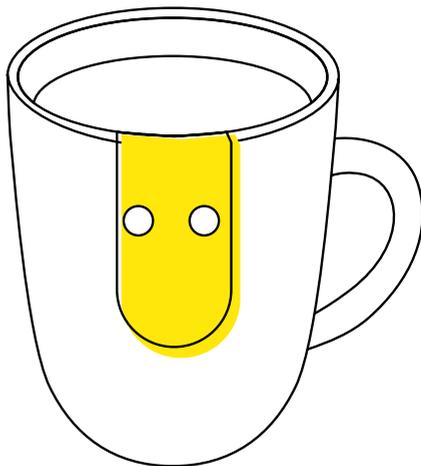


# Everyday living solutions

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.



## Talking watch

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

## Signature guide

A durable plastic device to help you write your signature on legal documents, forms and letters.

## Doro PhotoEasy 331ph telephone

- Easy-to-see telephone with three large memory buttons to hold a photograph or label.
- Redial memory and handset volume setting.
- Suitable for mild to moderate hearing loss.

## 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](http://shop.rnib.org.uk)** and  
**[dementiacircle.co.uk](http://dementiacircle.co.uk)**

# **RNIB Scotland and Alzheimer Scotland 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 Scotland

Telephone: **0141 772 5588**

Visit: **[rnib.org.uk](http://rnib.org.uk)**

Alzheimer Scotland

Tel: **0131 243 1453**

Visit: **[alzscot.org](http://alzscot.org)**

For support and information contact

RNIB Helpline on **0303 123 9999**

Dementia Helpline on **0808 808 3000**

VISION 2020 UK at **[vision2020uk.org.uk](http://vision2020uk.org.uk)**

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RNIB Reg Charity No 226227, SC039316

Alzheimer Scotland reg charity no SC022315  
and company no 149069

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