

A close-up, high-resolution photograph of an elderly person's face, focusing on their eyes. The skin is wrinkled, and the eyes are a light, greenish-grey color. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the skin and the intensity of the gaze.

# Spot the signs.

Only you can take the first step.



Supporting people  
with sight loss



My name is Ruth and I lost my sight when I was in my 60s. I have a sight condition called wet AMD.

Every 15 minutes someone in the UK starts to lose their sight.

If you're over 50, you're at greater risk of developing an eye disease that could take your sight. So it's vital you know how to spot the signs, because only you may notice changes to your vision.

By knowing the signs of AMD and other eye diseases, you can spot the signs that could save your sight.

This booklet will help you spot the four most common types of eye disease. Please read it carefully or pass it on to someone who is concerned about their eyesight.

Your sight is fragile and you must take care of it. You don't get a second chance. Unfortunately it was too late for me, but by being aware of the signs you could save your sight.

Ruth

PS. If you'd like to support RNIB and make a donation today, you can do so online at [rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns](https://rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns) Thank you.

[rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns](https://rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns)

## Warning

We have created this booklet to help you spot the early signs of eye disease. If you have further concerns about your sight please make an appointment to see an optometrist immediately.

However, in the event of an emergency or if you experience any of the following, please visit a hospital accident and emergency department as soon as possible:

- A sudden, serious change in your vision.
- Full or partial loss of vision in one or both eyes.
- An accident involving your eyes.
- Flashing lights or new floaters (small shapes) in your vision.

If you have any questions or queries regarding your sight, please call the RNIB Helpline on 0303 123 9999.

[rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns](https://www.rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns)

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Mid stage



## Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

It's an eye disease that affects the central part of your vision. In most cases, it won't lead to a complete loss of your sight, as your peripheral vision (side vision) doesn't change. If you hold your hand out a few inches in front of your face, it will give you a rough idea of the field of vision affected.

Later stage



If you're over 50, it's vital you know how to spot the signs. There are two types of AMD – “wet” and “dry”. The more aggressive of the two, “wet” AMD, can take your central vision in as little as three months if left untreated. This can be devastating. But if you're alert to the symptoms and act quickly, you can get treatment that can stop your sight from getting worse and, in some cases, reverse the damage that's been caused already.

## How to spot the signs of AMD

The following changes in your sight may mean you have AMD:

- Straight lines start to appear wavy, curved or distorted.
- Small print becomes difficult to read even when wearing reading glasses.
- People's faces start to appear blurry.

**If you think you have any of these symptoms, please make an appointment to see your optometrist immediately. It could save your sight.**

**“People must recognise there is an opportunity of avoiding sight loss from AMD by getting treatment quickly, like I did.”**

**\*Sheila, 77.**

Early stage



Later stage



## Cataracts

The chances are we all know someone who has had a cataract at one time or another. A cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens. It's a common condition that is most often a natural result of ageing.

Cataracts usually develop slowly and in both eyes, although not necessarily at the same time. They can cause problems with reading, recognising faces and appreciating colours – among other things.

Treating a cataract involves a straightforward operation to remove the lens and replace it with an artificial one. This operation isn't painful, it can be performed at any stage, and your sight will be as clear as it was before your cataracts started to develop.

## How to spot the signs of cataracts

You may be suffering from cataracts if you experience the following:

- Your sight becomes cloudier and more washed out.
- Lights seem to glare, and car headlights dazzle more than before.
- It seems like the lenses of your glasses are always dirty.
- A difference in how you see colours.

**If you think you have any of these symptoms, make an appointment to see your optometrist.**

**“It was such a relief when I had my cataracts removed. Had I known the operation would be so simple, I would have had it done earlier.”**

**\*Maude, 63.**

Mid stage



Later stage



## Eye conditions related to diabetes

Diabetes affects one in every 25 people in the UK. And although not everyone with diabetes will develop a sight problem, it's crucial you attend your regular diabetic eye screening to spot the signs in case it happens to you.

When diabetes affects the blood vessels at the back of the eye, this is called “diabetic retinopathy”. This can eventually lead to irreversible sight loss if not detected and treated at the right time.

Looking after your diabetes and attending your regular diabetic eye screening appointments is the best way to prevent and detect any sight problems your diabetes may cause. Early detection will help you get treatment that can save your sight.



## How to spot the signs of retinopathy

You are unlikely to notice any symptoms in the early stages. But the following could be signs that you have late-stage retinopathy:

- Some areas of your vision are becoming blurred or obscured.
- You see shapes floating in your field of vision.

**If you experience any of these symptoms contact your optometrist, diabetes care team or GP immediately.**

**“Don’t ignore it. Speak up. If you notice any changes in your sight, get it checked out straight away. I’m glad I did.”**

**\*Shaun, 51.**

Early stage



Later stage



## Glaucoma

Glaucoma is an eye condition that's most common among people over 40. It runs in families and people from African and Caribbean backgrounds who are four times more likely to develop glaucoma than the rest of the population.

It's caused by the fluid in your eyes not draining properly. This increases the pressure in your eye which, slowly over time, can damage the nerves that allow you to see properly. Left untreated, it can cause you to lose your peripheral and central vision permanently.

The damage is irreversible, but if it's identified early enough, you can control the effects of glaucoma with the right treatment and prevent further damage. These treatments include eye drops, laser treatment, and sometimes eye surgery.

## How to spot the signs of glaucoma

Glaucoma develops very slowly from the outside edges of your vision. So it can be almost impossible to identify by yourself. The only way to spot the signs of glaucoma is by going for regular eye tests. The tests can include:

- An examination of the retina and optic nerve.
- Measuring eye pressure – sometimes with a “puff of air” test.
- Visual field testing.

**Early diagnosis of glaucoma can prevent irreversible damage. So make sure you have regular eye tests with your optometrist.**

**“Not enough people are aware of the importance of having eye tests. If I hadn’t had my glaucoma picked up, I would have lost my sight completely.”**

**\*Marie, 42.**

## Next steps

Now you know how to spot the signs of the four most common eye diseases, we hope you'll continue to look after your eyesight. Please keep this booklet somewhere safe and refer to it whenever you need to – or pass it onto someone who's concerned about their eyesight.

For now, the most important thing to remember is that regular eye checks are essential – especially when you are over 50. It's true that our eyesight changes naturally as we get older, and many of us will need reading glasses to adapt to the changes in our vision. But regular eye tests and knowing how to spot the signs

of some eye conditions can prevent you from losing your sight unnecessarily.

Some of the eye diseases mentioned in this booklet can be treated or prevented and this can save a lot of distress in the future. If you are concerned about your vision, you should book an eye test immediately.

There are many instances in which you could be entitled to free eye tests – such as if you are over 60, or if you receive income support. For a full list of these instances please go to [nib.org.uk/eyetests](https://www.nib.org.uk/eyetests)

## What if you're diagnosed with an eye disease

Very few people ever expect severe sight loss to happen to them. So if you or a member of your family is diagnosed with an eye disease it can be very frightening and distressing.

If this ever happens to you, don't think you have to go through this alone. At RNIB, we are here for anyone affected by sight loss. You can call us at any time on **0303 123 9999**.

“At the RNIB Helpline, we answer hundreds of calls every week from people worried about sight loss. Whether they're looking for information on how to protect their sight, or have received a diagnosis and just want someone who understands to talk to – whatever your situation, we're here to help.”

**Mark Evans, Helpline Officer.**



## About RNIB

We are the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB). We're here for everyone affected by sight loss – that's almost two million people in the UK.

### Our three primary goals

- Stopping people losing their sight unnecessarily.
- Helping blind and partially sighted people live independently.
- Creating an inclusive society for all blind and partially sighted people.

If you or a loved one ever experiences a sight problem, we're here to help. Sometimes just talking to someone who understands how you feel and knows the problems you face can be enormously helpful. Thanks to donations from members of the public, RNIB is here to provide that support, as well as a whole range of vital services including:

- Emotional and practical support to help people cope with sight loss.
- Advice on getting about, shopping and managing money independently.
- Educational opportunities and help finding employment.



We hope you found this guide useful. For more information about eye diseases, or anything else about our work, please call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or visit **[rnib.org.uk](https://www.rnib.org.uk)**

Our work is only possible thanks to people like you. To make a donation, please visit **[rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns](https://www.rnib.org.uk/spotthesigns)** or call **0845 345 0054**. You can help people who are living with sight loss right now.

**\*We have changed people's details to protect their identities.**

**RNIB Helpline: 0303 123 9999**  
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