



Top tips for healthcare professionals

Accessing care:
Meeting patients' needs
January 2014



supporting blind and
partially sighted people

Help me get the most from my care as someone with sight loss

These “tips” have been compiled from information and suggestions gathered from RNIB supporters as well as existing RNIB guidance.

General tips

Introduce yourself

People with sight loss might not recognise a uniform or badge - tell them who you are, your role and what tasks you will be performing.

Ask me how you can help me

It won't always be obvious that someone has sight loss. They might not have a guide dog or a long cane and might not have dark glasses. Sometimes people will carry around a small white stick called a symbol cane. Not everyone with sight loss thinks of themselves as someone who is blind or partially sighted: sometimes people may identify with simply “having bad vision”. If you think someone might have sight loss and might need some help, just ask, “how can I help you?”

Ask me what format I need information in to ensure any written information I get is presented in a way that I can understand and in a format I can access such as large print, braille, audio CD or email.

Ensure individuals have to access to their own health information in a format they can read such as large print, email, audio CD or braille in line with the Equality Act (2010).

If you are dispensing medication, make sure that the person you dispense it to understands what each item is and where to get further accessible information, particularly if there are multiple brands with different packaging available.

Give me clear verbal instructions and information during examinations or medical tests.

Ensure you give people a running commentary of any tests and procedures that you are carrying out. Think about the words you use: “over there” doesn’t mean anything to someone with sight loss. Give people more specific instructions, for example, “there is a chair immediately behind you”. If you call patients in from a waiting room to a consultation, please wait for them and ask if they need assistance. Tell a person with sight loss when you are moving away from them or leaving the room.

Help me with navigation if I need it

If a person needs guiding, always ask them how they would like to be guided. Don’t hold the person’s arm: let them hold your arm at the elbow, with your arm by your side. While you’re walking you might tell them where you’re going and what to be aware of (for example, when you’re going up and down steps). If the person wants to sit down, you can put their hand on the back of a chair so that they can feel the back and arms.

Help me to use visual display systems to check-in

People are often required to use interactive displays to sign in for appointments, take a turn when waiting for tests, or when being called in for appointments. Visual displays and touch screen monitors are not accessible to many people with sight loss so make sure tactile and or audio enabled screens and announcements accompany the displays, or that someone is always available to offer assistance.

As an inpatient

Ensure I know my surroundings

When patients arrive, tell them about their surroundings so that they know where they are in a room and who is around them. Make sure all furniture around their bed and their possessions are kept in the same place so that they know where to find them. Help them use the entertainment system - which is often inaccessible to people with sight loss.

Make sure I know that that food or drink has arrived, where it is and what it is. Ask me if I need help.

People with sight loss can easily be unaware that food and drink has arrived and been placed on their tray unless someone directly tells them it has arrived and what it is. Use the clock method when you're serving food and tell people you're using it – meat/fish at 6 o'clock, potatoes/ rice at 12 o'clock and vegetables at 3 and 9 o'clock. Ask whether they need help.

Make sure I am stationed near toilets if possible or have access to a commode if desired.

Sight loss affects mobility so many people wish to be near the toilets in order to access them more easily.

Ask me if I want to have a symbol on my bed so that staff know that I have sight loss without me having to repeat it.

Many people are happy to have an identifying symbol on their bed or on their notes to ensure that staff know that they have sight loss.

Further Information

For further information please contact:

RNIB helpline: 0303 123 9999
Campaigns hotline: 020 7391 2123

RNIB and its supporters have also produced information on working with people with sight loss in the NHS, available at www.rnib.org.uk

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