

Factsheet

Dementia and low vision

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1. Introduction

This factsheet will be useful for people with dementia, their families, carers and professionals. There are other factsheets about 'Cataracts and dementia', 'Eye examinations for people with dementia' and 'Wearing spectacles with dementia'.

2. What is low vision?

Low vision is the term used when people have a reduced standard of vision which cannot be corrected by surgery, stronger spectacles (specs) or contact lenses. It can affect people of all ages.

3. What causes low vision?

Some of the commonest causes of low vision are:

- Macular degeneration
- Glaucoma
- Diabetes
- Cataract
- High myopia (short sight)
- Retinitis pigmentosa (RP)
- Stroke
- Albinism

4. How can I tell if I have low vision?

Different eye conditions affect your sight in different ways. You may find it difficult to read your paper or play cards, or recognise people's faces, be bothered by glare in bright light or may not notice objects around you. Everyone should have their sight tested at least once every two years, or once every year if you are 70 years old or older. An optometrist (optician) will be able to tell you how often you need to have your eyes tested. It is important to have an eye examination regularly because your optometrist will be able to tell you about any low vision problems and may refer you to the hospital for certification as sight impaired. You can choose not to be certified but still qualify through the NHS for help with your vision at a low vision clinic.

5. What are low vision aids (LVAs)?

Finding out whether you have low vision is important because there are special low vision aids (LVAs) which may help you to see better. The hospital low vision clinic will supply LVAs or your optician may be able to help you. If you have a care plan, then it should include when you need to wear your specs and use your LVAs and which specs and LVAs should be used together for different tasks.

Photographs of you using the LVAs when doing the activity you need them for is

helpful. You can attach the photographs to your care plan or keep them in your room to remind you. Take your LVAs with you if you go into hospital or stay with a friend to make sure you can see as well as possible while you are away from home.

6. Types of LVAs

Some LVAs help with close reading or crosswords by magnifying what you see. These include hand held magnifying glasses, units which sit on your newspaper or crossword, and special lenses which clip on to your specs. There are some LVAs which make it easier to watch TV or see bus numbers and special tinted specs for glare outdoors. A white cane or stick will help tell other people that you have low vision. Other types of LVAs include large print books and playing cards, coin holders, needle threaders and a wide range of audio aids including talking clocks and watches as well as tactile aids which help you identify objects by touch.

7. Looking after your LVAs

- Label your LVAs with your name and when to use them, for example 'Jane's TV LVA'.
- Some magnifiers come with a cord attached so you can wear them around your neck and do not lose them.
- Keep your LVAs clean, it is easier to see through clean lenses.
- Have your LVAs checked regularly to make sure they are not damaged and still right for you. Your sight may change or you may need another LVA for a new activity.

8. Useful Contacts

Alzheimer Scotland

160 Dundee Street

Edinburgh

EH11 1DQ

Helpline: 0800 808 3000

Email: helpline@alzscot.org

Web: www.alzscot.org/

Alzheimer's Society

43-44 Crutched Friars

London

EC3N 2AE

Helpline: 0300 222 11 22

Email: enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk

Web: www.alzheimers.org.uk

Association of British Dispensing Opticians

199 Gloucester Terrace

London

W2 6LD

Tel: 020 7298 5100

Email: general@abdolondon.org.uk

Web: www.abdo.org.uk/

Macular Society

Crown Chambers

South Street

Andover

Hampshire

SP10 2BN

Helpline: 0300 3030 111

Email: help@macularsociety.org

Web: www.macularsociety.org

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

105 Judd Street

London

WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Web: www.rnib.org.uk

The College of Optometrists

42 Craven Street

London

WC2N 5NG

Tel: 020 7839 6000

Web: www.college-optometrists.org

Thomas Pocklington Trust

Tavistock House South (Entrance D)

Tavistock Square

London

WC1H 9LG

Tel: 020 8995 0880

Email: hub@pocklington-trust.org.uk

Web: www.pocklington-trust.org.uk/

9. About the Vision UK Learning Disability, Dementia & Sight Loss Committee

The information in this fact sheet was produced by the Learning Disability, Dementia & Sight Loss (LD, DaSL) Committee. The committee was formed to promote better understanding of the issues facing people affected by learning disability and autism, dementia and sight loss. It also seeks to develop and disseminate materials resources and tools that contribute to good practice.

Visit www.visionuk.org.uk to find out more.