

Factsheet

Eye examinations for people with dementia

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Vision UK Learning Disability, Dementia & Sight Loss Committee

1. Introduction

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

2. Having an eye examination

Optometrists (opticians) and some doctors carry out eye examinations. They check:

- the health of your eyes;
- if you have any eye conditions such as cataracts or glaucoma; and
- whether you need any spectacles or changes to those you already have.

3. How often should I have my eyes tested?

Everyone should have their sight tested at least once every two years, or once every year if you are 70 years old or older. However, some people may need their sight tested more often. If you notice a change in your sight, if you cannot see as well as you used to, or if your eyes hurt or are red, then you should have an eye examination.

If you notice someone you care for having difficulty with the following it may mean they need their eyes examined:

- Recognising familiar faces.
- Reading facial expressions.
- Needing more light to do tasks.
- Being in bright light, low light or both.
- Finding things.
- Reading the newspaper or enjoying familiar hobbies.
- Playing cards or doing crosswords.
- Watching TV.
- Managing in unfamiliar surroundings.
- Locating food on the plate.
- Managing current spectacles (perhaps saying "I need new specs/glasses").

4. Free eye examinations

Eye examinations are free for everyone in Scotland. In the rest of the UK eye examinations are free for:

- children and students aged under 19 years old;
- people aged over 60 years old;
- people with diabetes;

- people with glaucoma;
- people over 40 years old with a close relative who has glaucoma;
- people who need certain complex lenses;
- people registered as partially sighted (sight impaired) or blind (severely sight impaired); and
- people in receipt of certain means tested benefits.

Your opticians practice can tell you if you, or the person you care for, is entitled to a free eye examination.

5. Where can I get my eye examination?

Most people have their eye examinations done by an optometrist in the high street. If you are housebound or live in a care home an optometrist may be able to visit you at home and carry out an eye examination – this is called a domiciliary eye examination. Your GP or local opticians practice should be able to tell you how to arrange an eye examination at home.

Tell the practice about the dementia at the time you book your appointment. You may need extra time to answer questions. It may be possible to see the testing room beforehand and find out whether any of the tests need eye drops and would normally be done in a darkened room.

Make a note of your appointment date and time in your diary or care plan to remind you when it is due. Make a note to take any spectacles you already use to the appointment.

You may like to bring your carer or relative to help you answer questions about your sight, what medications you take and the activities you enjoy. They may also be able to remind you of any problems you or they have noticed.

An eye examination can still be carried out even if you have difficulty speaking or responding to some questions.

6. What will happen during my eye examination?

- The optometrist will ask you about your general health and whether you already have glasses.
- You may be asked questions about your sight and how well you are managing day-to-day.
- Tests will be carried out to see if your eyes are healthy and if you need new glasses or contact lenses.
- The optometrist may also test the pressure in your eyes and your peripheral (side) vision.

7. After your eye examination

After the eye examination the optometrist will tell you the results and give you a copy of any prescription for glasses, and will tell you when you should wear them, for example when watching TV, reading or all the time. You can have your glasses made at the same opticians practice or by a different supplier. You will also be told when you should have your next eye examination.

If your optometrist finds an eye condition which needs investigation you will be given a letter for your GP who will refer you to the hospital. Most people who have an eye examination do not need to be referred to the hospital.

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

Social Care Institute of Excellence Dementia Gateway

<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/dementia/living-with-dementia/sensory-loss/>

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 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.

10. Glossary of terms

Optometrists or ophthalmic opticians

Optometrists or ophthalmic/dispensing opticians (often called opticians) usually work in high street practices or shops, or hospital eye departments.

They are qualified to test sight, prescribe glasses and detect eye conditions. They can also refer you, if necessary, to your GP (family doctor) who may in turn refer you onto a hospital.

Most optometrists are not qualified to diagnose, treat or operate on your eyes, although they will often discuss your eye condition with you. They can also provide advice on looking after your eyes and may help you with your low vision aids.