

# Factsheet

## Eye examinations for people with dementia

When you have dementia it is important to make the most of your sight. Wearing any glasses you need makes sure your sight is as good as it can be. Without glasses some people would have to cope with blurred vision all the time. Blurred vision may also worsen the symptoms of dementia and may increase a sense of isolation and confusion.

It is possible to have an eye examination if you have dementia. Your optometrist (optician) should be able to adjust the eye examination to meet your needs, accurately measure your vision and prescribe and update any glasses you may need.

An eye examination will also detect any eye conditions such as cataracts or glaucoma and it is an important first step in treating these conditions and avoiding sight loss.

This factsheet provides information on eye examinations for people with dementia. It will be useful for people with dementia, their families, carers and professionals. There is also a factsheet about the issues people with dementia may have about wearing glasses which you may also find useful.

## Having an eye examination

Eye examinations are important for everyone, they check;

- the health of your eyes
- whether you need any glasses
- whether the glasses you have are right for you.

Optometrists (opticians) carry out eye examinations. They are trained to detect eye conditions and to prescribe glasses or contact lens. They are also able to refer you to the hospital eye clinic, if they think an ophthalmologist (hospital eye doctor) needs to examine your eyes.



**Dementia and  
Sight Loss  
Interest Group**

## How often should I have my eyes tested?

Most people need an eye examination every two years. Some people may need them more frequently. If you notice a change in sight, if vision becomes more blurry or you can't see as well as you used to 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 people
- Needing more light to do tasks
- Having difficulty in bright lights or when lights dazzle
- Finding things
- Locating food on a plate

Once you have an examination your optometrist should tell you when you should next have your eyes examined.

## Free eye examinations

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

- people aged over 60
- people over 40 with a close relative who has been diagnosed with glaucoma
- people in receipt of certain means tested benefits.

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

## Where can I get my eye examination?

Most people have their eye examinations at an optometrist in the high street.

If you can't get out of the house without help then 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 optometrist should be able to tell you how to arrange an eye examination at home.

If you live in a care home then you should be able to arrange for an optometrist of your choice to carry out an eye examination. You should discuss with your care home how to arrange an eye examination. It may also be possible to have an eye examination at a day centre you attend.

## **What will happen during my eye examination?**

There are a number of different tests which make up the eye examination. These must include:

- Tests to work out if you need new glasses or contact lenses.
- Tests to check if the inside of your eye is healthy.

Your optometrist may also need to:

- Check the pressure in your eyes.
- Check your level of vision and your peripheral vision.
- Check the health of the outside of your eye including your eye movements.

These tests are made up of different activities which may include:

- Your optometrist asking you lots of questions about your eyesight and your general health and any medication you may be taking.
- Reading letters on a chart. For those who are not able to read, there are other tests which use pictures or matching letters and pictures.
- Your optometrist looking inside your eye using an ophthalmoscope – a hand held instrument which allows the optometrist to see your retina inside your eye. They will need to come very close to you and shine a bright light into your eye while they ask you to look in different directions. This test checks the health of the inside of your eye including your retina.
- Your optometrist checking that the muscles that control your eye movements are working well, by asking you to look in certain directions or to follow something with your eyes as it moves in front of you.
- Looking at letters on a chart through various lenses in a special frame or machine.

- Your optometrist checking the pressure in your eyes, usually with the 'puff of air' test. This helps to detect glaucoma or problems with eye pressure. It won't hurt but it may make you jump!

## **Things to consider**

- Some of these tests may need to take place in a darkened room
- The optometrist may need to ask lots of questions about your sight and how well you are managing day to day
- The optometrist may ask to place some frames on your face to help test your focussing and work out the strength of any glasses you may need.

If you think you will have a problem with any of these activities then let your optometrist know beforehand as it may be possible to adjust the test to make things easier for you.

## **Having an eye examination with dementia**

It is possible to have an eye examination at nearly all stages of dementia. If you find communication difficult then an optometrist can make changes to the eye examination to help perform it.

If you are thinking of having an eye examination and you have dementia then the following may help

- Let the optometrist know about the dementia at the time you book your appointment.
- Ask for an optometrist with experience of providing eye examinations for people with dementia.
- Book your eye test at a time of day that suits you best, you may be better in the morning than the afternoon for example.

- You may not be able to complete all the tests in one sitting. Your optometrist may need to see you another time to continue and complete your examination.
- You might want to invite your carer or someone who knows you well to come with you to the test. They can help you to answer questions about how your sight is day to day, 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.
- Ask if the optometrist is able to give you a longer appointment time for your eye examination. It may take longer to perform the tests and it is better not to feel rushed.
- Let the optometrist know how well you can answer direct questions, or follow instructions. This will help the optometrist plan how to perform the tests to suit your need.
- It is possible to test the health of your eyes and check your glasses prescription even if you can't speak.

## **After your eye examination**

After the eye examination your optometrist will let you know the results. They will let you know whether your eyes are healthy or if they have found any eye condition such as a cataract. If your optometrist finds something which needs to be seen at the hospital then they will refer you (with your permission). Most people who have eye tests don't need to be referred to the hospital.

Your optometrist will tell you if you need a new pair of glasses, if there is a change in the prescription of your glasses or if there is no change. If you do need new glasses or a change of glasses your optometrist should let you know why you need them and when you should wear them, for example when watching TV, reading or all of the time.

If you need glasses you will probably have to pay for them. The charge varies and depends on the lenses you need and the cost of the frames you choose. Your optometrist should have a range of frames at different prices.

If you are on a low income, you may be entitled to a voucher which will help with the cost of your glasses. Ask your optometrist if you are entitled to a voucher.

If you need a new prescription your optometrist may be able to put your new lenses into your current glasses frames. This may help avoid any confusion as your glasses won't look any different but they will be up to date.

Your optometrist must also give you a copy of your prescription and you can use this to get your glasses from a different supplier.

Once you have your new glasses it is important for them to be fitted properly. Your optometrist or a member of their team, sometimes a dispensing optician, will make sure that the glasses fit your face and sit in the right place so that they correct your sight properly.

Sometimes with day to day use glasses can stop fitting as well as they should. If you notice that your glasses aren't fitting as well as they used to then ask your optometrist or dispensing optician to adjust them to make them fit as well as possible.

## **Summary**

Most people should have their eyes tested once every two years and if you have dementia it is possible for the optometrist to adjust the eye examination so they can prescribe and update any glasses you may need. An eye examination will also detect any eye conditions such as cataracts or glaucoma and it is an important first step in treating these conditions and avoiding sight loss.

Eye examinations also make sure that your glasses are up to date and that your sight is as clear as it can be. Making sure that your glasses are correct and up to date may help to make sure that you aren't coping with needless sight problems as well as your dementia.

## Useful contacts

### **Royal National Institute of Blind People**

105 Judd Street,  
London  
WC1H 9NE  
t: 0303 123 9999  
[helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)  
[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

### **Alzheimer's Society**

Devon House  
58 St Katharine's Way  
London  
E1W 1LB  
t : 0300 222 11 22  
[enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@alzheimers.org.uk)  
[www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

### **Alzheimer Scotland**

22 Drumsheugh gardens  
Edinburgh  
EH3 7RN  
t: 0131 243 1453  
[info@alzscot.org](mailto:info@alzscot.org)

### **Action for Blind People**

53 Sandgate Street  
London  
SE15 1LE  
**0303 123 9999**  
[helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)  
[www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk](http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk)

### **Social Care Institute of Excellence Dementia Gateway**

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

## **Sight Tests at Home Leaflet**

[http://www.fodo.com/downloads/Sight\\_tests\\_at\\_home\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.fodo.com/downloads/Sight_tests_at_home_WEB.pdf)

## **About the VISION 2020 UK Dementia and Sight Loss Interest Group (DASLIG)**

This information was produced by the VISION 2020 (UK) Ltd Dementia and Sight Loss Interest Group (DASLIG), led by representatives from Alzheimer's Society, RNIB, Thomas Pocklington Trust, Macular Society and Royal College of Ophthalmologists. DASLIG is working to increase the knowledge and information available for people living with dementia and sight loss, their families and friends. DASLIG also works with professionals and organisations to increase understanding and good practice to improve the lives of individuals with both dementia and sight loss.