



Sight loss: What we needed to know

This information has been put together by people who have experienced losing their sight



Organisations involved in this booklet

Association of Directors of Adult Social Services

Blind Veterans UK

Guide Dogs

RNIB

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists

VISION 2020 UK

Visionary (representing local sight
loss organisations)

This supports the delivery
of the UK Vision Strategy

Publication date May 2016

This booklet is available to download from
www.rnib.org.uk/sightlossinfo

This information has been put together by people living with sight loss who are at different stages of their sight loss journey.



We want to share some information and advice that would have helped us. Throughout we have included quotes about our experiences, and our top 10 tips for coping with sight loss. We hope that you will find it useful.

Austin, Billy, Bob, Charly, Garry, Isa, Jenny, Jim, Jonathan, Nick, Sarah, Stephen, Steve, Sue, Suzanne and Valerie



I was diagnosed with macular degeneration. It was a trying and frightening time for me. I was not given any information and what I needed was a guide to where to find answers to my questions. If I'd had this booklet at the time, it would have helped me. I hope it helps you to find the support you need.

Isa



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Introduction

If you're reading this, then you (or a close relative or a friend) have experienced sight loss. You'll have been to a hospital, where an Eye Doctor (Ophthalmologist) has told you that you have lost vision or that you qualify for a Certificate of Vision Impairment (a document which states that you are sight impaired or severely sight impaired).



For some people, sight loss comes suddenly and for others, it's a part of long-term health issues. Either way it may be life changing.

It can be a difficult, worrying time and you'll be feeling all sorts of emotions. For some people, it may be a particularly distressing time, too. It's perfectly normal to feel upset, angry and overwhelmed. You may be struggling to understand why this has happened to you and how you're going to cope now and in the future.

You're not alone. It's estimated that there are 1.7 million people in England living with sight loss that has a significant impact on their daily lives, and each year around 20,000 Certificates of Vision Impairment are issued.

We've been through what you're now experiencing and asked many of the same questions you may have asked. This is the information that we have found to be helpful, and we hope that this will give you some reassurance. You're bound to experience challenges and our aim is to help you to discover some of the solutions.

We do acknowledge that there's a lot of information in this booklet and we suggest that you read it at your own pace.



The emotional impact of sight loss

Losing your sight

It's very common to experience a wide range of emotions. Diagnosis of sight loss may have left you feeling lonely and isolated. There's no need to apologise or feel guilty about this, it's natural. It's important for you to express your feelings and to find the support and space that you need. In this section we have put together some ideas that may help you.



I didn't go out of the house for about two and a half years. I was on my own. I don't know if it was the shock, the feeling of loss, I don't know, but I just couldn't think about doing anything, and my head was a total blank.

Jonathan

It's common for people to experience feelings of despair when they lose their sight, but usually these are temporary and will lessen over time. While it's natural to feel down, if you're struggling, we would advise you to talk to your GP or another healthcare professional and to consider counselling.



I lost sight in my right eye many years ago and have had over 10 operations on my left eye. I know that it's hard at first – it was for me. There is help out there, and you're not on your own.

Jenny

Your identity

Some people with sight loss may struggle with their own sense of identity, with the change from being an independent person to someone who is living with an impairment. This is a very common feeling and many people find it difficult at first. However, there is support available to help you to adjust to a new way of life and to rebuild your confidence and independence. There are many positive examples of people who have started new careers, made changes within their existing careers, or rediscovered old or new hobbies, so that they can continue to enjoy life regardless of their sight loss.



I was born with pretty poor sight, so I never had the experience of being able to see well before losing some sight. But I've had to put up with people laughing at me when I hold things close or don't recognise them.

Many full-sighted people don't know how to deal with your distress, just as they do not know what to say when someone has been bereaved.

Even if you can't do all the things that you used to do, or they may take longer, you're still the same person inside, with the unique gifts and personality you've always had.

Richard

Your relationships

Sight loss can also have an impact on members of your family, your friends or the people you work with. You may have a partner, family member or friend who will be supporting and helping you, and they may be feeling overwhelmed, too. It's natural for them to be going through a range of emotions and have fears and concerns.



I've had to cope with my husband losing his sight. My routine has changed and I've had to learn new skills in order to do the same things I used to do, so that we can both have a quality of life. Sight loss also has a big impact on partners and carers.

Sue

It may be helpful for your family, or those closest to you, to have an idea of what you're experiencing. This can be done by getting special glasses that imitate different eye conditions. Ask about these at your Eye Clinic or local sight loss society.

You may be worried about how your sight loss may affect your relationship, along with concerns about becoming dependent upon your partner. We encourage you to talk together about the things that you'd like to manage for yourself and areas where you'd like some support. It can be a fine line between helping someone and taking away their independence.



You're going to have a reaction to losing your sight and it'll change the way you're going to live your life. It happened to me, but it's not going to change who you are. I was very quick to think of all the things I couldn't do but I've found a way to do things. There's nothing worse than being overprotected and I'm now able to do many things for myself.

Charly

Your sight loss may vary from day to day, and this may affect how much help you need or want.



Sometimes as a partner and carer, you just have to feel your way on a daily basis. Talk to each other, learn from experience, and you'll find the best way for both of you.

Billy

If you are a parent or grandparent sight loss will bring new challenges for you. However, there's no reason for it to stop you from parenting, or enjoying your grandchildren, although you may need to make some adjustments.

If you have children or grandchildren, talking to them about your sight loss and describing to them what you can see, will help them to understand how it affects you.

Your children or grandchildren will want to help you, but we encourage you to try to be as independent as possible.

What sort of help is available?



Talking to other people and finding out what's in your local area

It may help to talk about your feelings with friends, family or others around you who are willing to listen. It may also help to talk to people who have had similar experiences and understand what you're going through.

Your local sight loss charity or society can put you in touch with other people in your area, and offer support for partners, family members and friends. Visionary is the umbrella organisation for sight loss societies across the country, providing you with details of your local sight loss society.

Visit www.visionary.org.uk for more information.

You may also find it helpful to find out about the activities that are available for people with sight loss in your area. Local sight loss charities or

societies have lots of information, advice and practical solutions for people with sight loss.

Another good place to meet other people with similar experiences is RNIB Connect. You can share your experiences, hear what others are going through, and learn and find solutions to some of the difficulties you're facing. You can also connect with people, find out about activities and services in your local area, and join telephone groups or chat online to discuss your sight condition, and the way technology can help you to stay independent. For more information, call RNIB's Contact Team on **0303 1234 555** or visit **www.rnib.org.uk/connect**

RNIB Connect Radio is made by and for people with sight loss. It broadcasts nationally with a variety of shows to suit all tastes. It has lots of information about living with sight loss. You can hear RNIB Connect Radio on Freeview Channel 730, online, or digitally via Radioplayer and Tunein apps.

People who have served in the Armed Forces including National Service are eligible for specialist support from Blind Veterans UK. This includes social activities and respite breaks. They also help people to learn new skills and hobbies. For more information, call **0800 389 7979** or visit **www.noonealone.org.uk**

How a Sight Loss Adviser can help you

Your Eye Clinic at the hospital may have an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO) or Sight Loss Adviser. They can provide you with information and advice on getting the help and support that you need. This includes assistance with understanding the certification and registration

process, accessing emotional support and counselling if necessary, and providing information on services in the community, such as referring to your local council and voluntary organisations. If there are no ECLOs at your Eye Clinic, RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** can provide you with more information.

Knowing more about your eye condition

RNIB has very useful, medically-approved information on individual eye conditions. If you want to know more about your eye condition, then visit **www.rnib.org.uk/eyeconditions**

It's not always about the things that you can't see

Charles Bonnet Syndrome is something that can happen to people who lose some or all of their sight. People can see things that are not there (these are called visual hallucinations) and it can be very frightening as people may think they are experiencing mental health problems. For more information, visit **www.rnib.org.uk/eyeconditions**



Since losing vision, I kept seeing large cows fly down from the sky and I was frightened that I was losing my mind. I couldn't tell anyone about this, but by chance I found out about Charles Bonnet Syndrome. It was such a relief. If I had been told about this before, it would have helped me cope with things better.

Rea

Who you can talk to

There are many organisations that provide free telephone counselling for different eye conditions. For example, age-related macular degeneration is the largest cause of sight loss, and the Macular Society has a team of professional counsellors who have been trained to listen, to help people talk through their feelings, and to find ways of dealing with them. To contact the Macular Society, call **0300 3030 111** or visit **www.macularsociety.org**

You may find it useful to look up your condition on the internet to get the details of other organisations that are able to help you.

There are a number of other things that you may find helpful, such as joining a telephone befriending service, or relaxing through yoga, meditation, mood music and audiobooks. If you want more information, contact your local sight loss society or RNIB's helpline on **0303 123 9999** or visit **www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk**. Some people have also found religion or their faith to be beneficial.

Getting out and about

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association provides a service called 'My Guide', which helps if you're feeling less confident about getting around. The service trains volunteers to use sighted-guiding techniques to help you to get to the places you want to go to, with confidence and on your own terms. You may want to learn or re-learn familiar routes to get to the shops, or to maintain your fitness. Training can also be provided

for your friends and family to learn simple and safe guiding techniques to help you. For more information, call **0800 953 0113**, email **myguide@guidedogs.org.uk** or visit **www.guidedogs.org.uk**

Low vision

The vast majority of people who are issued with a CVI will retain some sight. There is equipment and there are techniques to help you to make the most of the vision that you have. We strongly recommend that you have a low vision assessment, as there are plenty of things that can be achieved with the right help.

Your low vision service

Your local low vision service can provide support and further information on sight loss. The low vision service will assess and train you to use magnifying aids. Magnifiers and similar low vision equipment is available on long term loan from NHS services, including, in some areas, schemes based at local Optometrists or local societies. Low vision services across the country are organised by different organisations. For example, they may be based in your local hospital or may be provided by a local sight loss society. You can ask your Eye Doctor (Ophthalmologist) or the Eye Clinic Liaison Officer or Sight Loss Adviser (if there is one) about your nearest low vision service.

Explaining the Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI)

Functions of the CVI

The CVI has three main functions:

- It qualifies you to be registered with your local council as sight impaired (partially sighted) or severely sight impaired (blind).
- It lets your local council know about your sight loss. They have a duty to contact you to offer registration and to see if you need help with day-to-day tasks.
- The CVI records important information about the cause of your sight loss. It helps the NHS to identify any trends in certain eye conditions and helps with planning services.





What is registration?

Registration is not just your initial certification. It is carried out by your local council rather than the hospital. The term registration is often used as shorthand to cover the whole process but there are two distinct and separate stages. You are only registered after you have completed the second stage.

Stage 1 – Certification (at the eye clinic)

When an Eye Doctor (Ophthalmologist) considers your sight loss to have reached a certain threshold, there are two categories, namely “sight impaired” (also referred to on the form as partially

sighted) and “severely sight impaired” (also referred to on the form as blind).

Very few people placed in the “severely sight impaired” category ever lose their sight completely and many retain some vision.

When the Eye Doctor (Ophthalmologist) signs the form, they are “certifying that you are eligible to be registered” with your council. You will also be asked to sign the form. The Eye Doctor (Ophthalmologist) may tell you that they are registering you; however, they are only completing the CVI, the first stage of the registration process.

Stage 2 – Registration (in the community)

When your council receives a copy of your CVI, someone should contact you and invite you to register as “sight impaired” or “severely sight impaired”.

Your council may have already been in touch with you, or they may contact you at some point in the future. One of the things they will do is to talk about the purpose and benefits of registration. It is up to you to decide if you want to be registered.

If you want more time to think about it, then you can also ask to be registered at a later time. It doesn't cost anything and there are benefits to being registered (these are described later). The vast majority of people choose to be registered.

The date of registration

Your registration date is the date on which the CVI is signed by your Eye Doctor (Ophthalmologist) and the same date is taken as the date of registration by your council.

If you decide not to be registered but change your mind at a later date you should have your registration status backdated to the date the CVI was signed. The date of registration is important as it may affect your entitlement to certain welfare benefits.

Understanding what support you can expect from your council can be very confusing. Below are some of the key things that you should expect. However, if you're still unsure, then please contact your local sight loss society or call RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999**.

Help that you can expect from your local council

Registering your sight loss

Every council must hold a register of people living in their area who are sight impaired and severely sight impaired.

Your council will receive a copy of your CVI, and should make contact with you within two weeks, to talk to you about registration and the benefits of being registered.

Your council may also have an agreement with another organisation to contact you on their behalf about registration. So don't worry if it's someone else that contacts you on your council's behalf.



At this point your assessment should start. Under the Care Act 2014, your council has a duty to assess what support you may need and you are entitled to an assessment whether or not you choose to be registered.

Finding out your care and support needs

There are different types of support you can receive from your council. They include vision rehabilitation, which helps to ensure that you have the right information, aids, training and skills to adapt to living with sight loss.

You may also be eligible to receive longer term help with daily living, including support in the home and accessing the community.

Your assessment will most likely start with being on the telephone with someone in a specialist sensory loss team, or in a telephone contact centre. They have the right skills and knowledge to help you, and you will be asked about your needs and what it is you want to achieve. They may also provide you with information and advice.

The next step may include someone coming to your home.

How vision rehabilitation support can help you

Vision rehabilitation is support that your council must provide to help you to be as independent as possible. Your council should not charge you for this and should make it available for as long as you need it, to help you achieve your personal goals that have been identified in the assessment. You also don't have to be registered to receive vision rehabilitation support.

Types of support you may receive include:

- Understanding your eye condition, learning what it means for you and your family, and explaining the certification and registration process.
- Coming to terms with your condition and understanding the changes and adjustments you may need to live your life.
- Looking after yourself and learning new ways of completing tasks.
- Moving around your home safely and looking after it. This includes assessing your mobility needs, for example, measures to reduce the risks of falls, the use of stairs, and advice on appropriate equipment and mobility aids. If needed, time can be arranged for you to receive one to one training.
- Assessing your needs for daily living skills training, for example, any support or training you need to prepare meals, make drinks, use the oven and hob, as well as ironing and shopping.

- If needed, referring you to a low vision service, where someone will assess your needs and recommend the use of aids such as magnifiers.
- Reviewing the lighting in your home to see if any improvements can be made.
- Getting out and about, travelling confidently and safely, and using public transport.
- You may be referred for a benefits check, for example, with regard to claiming Personal Independence Payments or Attendance Allowance, and concessions such as blue badge and travel passes.
- Looking at your communication needs and how you keep in touch with others, such as reading, writing, telling the time, and using smartphones, tablets and speech software.



- Ensuring you have access to training, education and learning opportunities.
- Signposting you to a Disability Employment Advisor or ways to volunteer.
- Providing information on social activities that match your interests, for example, community groups, local sight loss charities and societies.
- Providing information on talking books and newspapers.
- Looking at your emotional needs for example, counselling, telephone support, peer support, courses or groups.
- Putting you in contact with other parts of your council, the local low vision service and other organisations in the local community where you can get help.

You should also be given the contact details of the vision rehabilitation service, in case you need to reach them in the future to answer any questions, or if your needs have changed. If you feel that you aren't ready to engage with the vision rehabilitation service yet, then you can always get in touch at a later time.



Initially, my confidence took a massive dent, but something that really helped me was participating in a ‘Living with Sight Loss’ course run by Action for Blind People. I found it incredibly beneficial. I met other people who were in a similar situation to me and together, we shared hints, tips and stories. It made me realise that I was not on my own and it really helped me to re-build my confidence. My group still meets up regularly and we continue to support each other.

Steve

Equipment that might help you

Your vision rehabilitation assessment should also help to identify the equipment or aids that you need to help you to maintain, or increase, your independence. They include:

- Kitchen aids, such as a liquid level indicator (to help you make a hot drink safely).
- Changes to lighting.
- Walking aids, such as a white stick or a symbol cane.



I became sight impaired following a stroke and I really lacked confidence about going out on my own. As an ex-service person I went to one of the Blind Veterans UK centres which really helped me. The Rehabilitation Worker from my council has also been very helpful. They changed the white stick I was using and taught me how to use it walking on the pavements and getting on and off buses, and are helping me to use it at railway stations. This has all helped me to build up my confidence again, make me less dependent upon others and enable me to get out and about by myself.

Garry

Your council should provide the equipment (aids and minor adaptations) that has been identified in your assessment, and you should be supported with how to use the equipment provided. Some charities also provide equipment and, in many areas, work closely with councils.

You will also receive advice on where you can buy other items of equipment to make your life easier.



It's only been lately that I've got a talking phone with phone numbers in there. So, when I fancy talking to someone, I can.

Jonathan

On-going care and support that you may need

You may also be eligible for longer term support. Your council must carry out a care and support assessment to find out what is important to you. The government has set minimum criteria that people must meet in order to qualify for longer term care and support.

Someone may come to your home to carry out the assessment, or you may be asked to complete a form through a council website. You can request that someone visits you at home.

Your council will be looking for three things when carrying out an assessment. Firstly, that you have a disability; secondly that you need support to meet two or more out of a list of outcomes; and thirdly, that there is a significant impact on your wellbeing.



The assessed outcomes cover a range of areas, including your ability to move around your home safely, such as using kitchen facilities. Other outcomes include maintaining a habitable and safe home, preparing food, developing and maintaining family or other relationships, and accessing and engaging in work, training, education or volunteering.

If you have already received vision rehabilitation support, but think that your needs are not being met and require some more help, then you can also ask your council for a care and support needs assessment.

If you are eligible for support your council will provide you with a package of care, or the funding to arrange it yourself (this is called a Direct Payment). Depending on your income you may have to pay a contribution towards this.

If your council hasn't contacted you, and you feel you might be 'at risk' without this help, we strongly recommend you contact your council as soon as possible. Your council must carry out an assessment if you ask for one.

If you need more information, contact your local sight loss society.

Help for those supporting you

Under the Care Act 2014, carers are entitled to an assessment of their own needs to help them to continue to care. To ask for an assessment, contact your council.



What it means for work, education and training

Support for you to continue working

If you're currently in employment your sight loss does not mean you have to stop working.

Sight loss is considered a disability under equality legislation. Employers are not allowed to discriminate against someone based on their disability. For someone experiencing sight loss, this means that it is unlawful to dismiss someone on the grounds of disability, and instead, requires employers to make changes in the workplace to meet a person's specific needs. These are called 'reasonable adjustments'.

You should not assume that you need to resign from your job, as equipment and support is available that can enable you to remain in your current job. If you cannot perform this job anymore, there may still be other more suitable roles within your organisation. It's important to talk to your employer to discuss the best options. They may also need some help in understanding how they can support you best.

If you're experiencing difficulties with your work, there are organisations that may be able to help you, such as a trade union (if you have one), RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or your local Citizens Advice Bureau.



I can't see people's faces, and I see buses coming as a big red blur. I am still getting used to living like this, but I'm still working. My advice is to get as much information as you can.
Stephen

How 'Access to Work' can help you

The government's 'Access to Work' scheme provides practical and financial support for disabled people in work or starting a new job. It provides grants towards any extra employment costs that result from a disability, including special aids and equipment, Support Workers and travel to work. For more information, contact the Access to Work Team on **0345 268 8489**.



At the age of 15, I went from being fully sighted to having no central vision and limited peripheral vision. I was determined that losing my sight wasn't going to dictate how I lived my life. What drove me the most was making sure I finished my education and got a job. I was unsure about how I could perform most jobs. The 'Access to Work' scheme gave me confidence at interviews that I would get the support I needed to get to work and to do the job. Now, four years on after leaving University, I have always been in work. It hasn't been easy, but I try to keep positive and have a smile on my face. Life is there to be enjoyed, so make the most of it.

Josh

Education and training

Attending a further education college can provide you with the skills to start or change your career. The Disability Employment Advisor at your local job centre will be able to give you advice and guidance on opportunities for re-training.



Losing my sight meant that I wasn't able to continue with the job that I had. I lost all my confidence and refused to leave the house. A Rehabilitation Worker really helped me to regain my confidence and to go out again. I enrolled on a college course and I've just passed level 2 of my accountancy course. I know that it can feel like the world has ended, but never be afraid to ask for help. Things can get better.

Nick



The benefits you may be entitled to

There's a range of very important benefits that are available for people with sight loss.

Different benefits are available, depending if you are:

- Registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired.
- Registered as severely sight impaired.
- Not registered but have sight loss.

Financial and welfare benefits

If you have sight loss, and/or a long-term health condition or disability that affects your ability to live independently, you could apply for:

- Personal Independence Payments (if you are aged 16 to 64).
- Attendance Allowance (if you are 65 and over, and have care needs).
- Statutory Sick Pay or Employment and Support Allowance (if you are unable to work).
- Working Tax Credit (if you are in work).

If you're registered as severely sight impaired, you are eligible for the Blind Person's Tax Allowance. This means that you can earn more money before you start to pay income tax. For further information, contact your local tax office or visit

www.gov.uk/blind-persons-allowance/overview

There are also benefits available for carers, such as carers allowance.

Welfare benefits are regularly reviewed and sometimes changed. We advise you to ask for more information to check if you, or your carer, are eligible. There are organisations that can help you to do this. Contact RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

Travel help

Free bus travel

If you're registered as severely sight impaired, sight impaired, or have a CVI, then you are entitled to a concessionary disabled person's bus pass. This enables you to travel anywhere in England, but there are time restrictions on when you can travel. To apply contact your council.

Some areas operate different types of concessionary travel schemes. For example, people living in London can apply for a Disabled Persons Freedom Pass. This will give you free travel on public transport such as buses, the tube, and trams. You can use your pass on most journeys across London, but there may be certain times limitations on when you can use your pass.

The London Taxicard Scheme provides subsidised taxis for disabled people who find it difficult to use public transport. Ask your council about the available travel concessions in your area.



I used to drive myself before losing my sight. White stick training has given me the confidence to go out. I've found that bus drivers, train staff and the general public are all helpful. My advice is to take the first step, rather than saying you can't do it.

Austin

Blue Badges

A Blue Badge may enable the person driving you to park in a disabled bay, on the street, or in car parks. If you're registered as severely sight impaired, then you qualify automatically. If you're sight impaired, you will need to be assessed. In many places, there will be no charge to park. To apply contact your council.

Disabled Person's Railcard

If you're registered as severely sight impaired or sight impaired you're entitled to a Disabled Person's Railcard that enables you, and another person travelling with you, to get 1/3 off ticket prices. You do have to pay for a disabled person's railcard. To apply telephone **0345 605 0525** or go to **www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk**

Travel Assistance

Rail companies provide help with planning your journey. They can go through ticket options and arrange the assistance you need when you travel. This includes having staff to meet you upon arrival. There are several ways that you can book travel assistance.

Call National Rail Enquiries on **0345 748 4950**, or go to **www.disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk**. You can also speak to the staff in person at any staffed train station.

Airline companies also provide travel assistance. Contact the airline directly for more information.



I care for my husband who uses a wheelchair. The travel assistance means that we're able to go out together, which isn't really possible in normal circumstances. We've also been further afield, and received assistance on the train to France and the aeroplane to Canada.

Valerie

Television licence

If you're registered as severely sight impaired, you can get 50 per cent off your TV Licence. For more information and to apply, or visit **www.tvlicensing.co.uk/reducedfee**

Assistance with directory enquiries

If you're registered as severely sight impaired or sight impaired, you can make use of the free directory enquiries service. You can use this service whether or not you are with BT. To sign up for this service call **0800 587 0195**. Once signed up, all you have to do is to dial **195** and you can talk to a trained operator who will help you with your enquiry. If you ask to be connected to the number you need, you will then be charged for the call.

Assistance from utility companies

Some utilities suppliers (gas, electricity and water) offer certain discounts and support for people with sight loss. Contact your supplier to find out what you may be eligible for.

Being sight impaired or severely sight impaired qualifies you to sign up to your utility supplier's Priority Services Register. This can get you extra help and support with your gas, electricity and water. For more information, contact your utility suppliers.

Leisure concessions

There are a number of leisure concessions such as sport, theatre or theme parks, that you and your partner, relative or carer, may be entitled to if you have sight loss. We advise you to always ask about the available discounts.



Since losing my sight, I've found a new passion for watching rugby and now my wife and I get discounted tickets and go to matches regularly.

Jim

You may be entitled to concessions at the cinema if you're registered as severely sight impaired or claim certain benefits, including Personal Independence Payments and Attendance Allowance. For more information ask at your local cinema.

Audio description

Some films at the cinema have audio description, where someone explains what is happening on the screen. The majority of cinemas now have this available, but check with your local cinema.

Some television channels offer this service on certain programmes. Some theatre productions, museums and exhibitions now also have audio-described tours.

Vocaleyes is a nationwide audio-description service, providing access to the arts for people with sight loss. For more information, visit www.vocaleyes.co.uk

Reading and accessing information

Reading is important to all of us. There are different ways of reading and the best way to find out what works for you is to try them out. All banks, utility companies and other providers can send your information in different formats, such as large print, audio and electronic or online.

Daily newspapers and magazines are available in audio format by subscribing to RNIB Newsagent, or online directly from the publisher. The Talking News Federation can put you in touch with your local talking newspaper group. For more information, visit www.tnf.org.uk

There are a variety of audio books available. For more information, call the RNIB Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or visit www.rnib.org.uk or call Calibre Audio Library on **01296 432 339** or visit www.calibre.org.uk or call Listening Books on **020 7407 9417** or visit www.listening-books.org.uk. Your local library

can also help you with books in your preferred reading format.

You can now receive and read a lot of material using electronic devices. These include video magnifiers, text to speech scanners, and everyday technology such as smartphones, e-book readers, MP3 players and computers. Most smartphones and tablets have in-built accessible features such as magnification and screen reading facilities. Computers can also be made accessible with magnification and screen reading software.

Different types of equipment can be demonstrated and purchased at your nearest local sight loss society resource centre.

Sight tests

It's really important that you continue to have your eyes checked after you've been through the certification process. You can still be vulnerable to further sight deterioration, so it's important to look after your eyes.

Sight tests at home

If you're registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired, you're entitled to a regular NHS sight test free of charge. You may be entitled to a mobile service where you can have your eyes tested at home. To find out if you're entitled to this, and to learn about providers in your area, telephone **111**.




Our top 10 tips

Listed below are the things that we've found to be helpful. We hope that they'll be useful to you, too.

- 1 Never be afraid to ask people for help.
- 2 There is no question that is too small to ask.
- 3 Don't assume the first solution will be right for you. We're all different. If it's not working out, ask again, ask someone else and try something different.
- 4 Talk to people who are facing, or who have faced, similar experiences.
- 5 Find your local sight loss group. There is a lot that you can get out of it and a lot that you can give to it, too.
- 6 Try to stay healthy and exercise regularly. Find out about how your local leisure centre can support you.
- 7 Having a visit from a Rehabilitation Officer/Worker can really help.
- 8 Don't give up on your smartphone or your computer, as most have accessible features already built in. There are lots of packages available that enable everyone to use a computer.
- 9 Try equipment before you buy it. Some local societies run Resource Centres, where equipment is displayed.
- 10 If you belonged to any organisations, societies or clubs before your sight loss, don't give them up, and stay involved in the things that you enjoy.

There are also lots of practical things that we have found to be helpful, for example, putting your clock at head height and changing your lighting for brighter lights.

 I think it's very important to keep doing the things that you were involved in before sight loss.

Bob





Your rights under the Equality Act

By being certified as sight impaired or severely sight impaired, you're automatically protected from unfair treatment under the Equality Act 2010.

If you feel you have been treated unfairly because of your sight loss, or find it difficult to access services because reasonable changes have not been made, you can challenge this.

For example, if you have difficulty with reading documents, you can ask for them to be sent to you in large print. If this does not happen, it is a form of discrimination that you can challenge.

If this doesn't resolve things, you can get advice from your local sight loss society, RNIB's Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Where you can go to get more help and support

The following organisations provide useful information and may also offer vision rehabilitation, training, equipment, support and counselling, depending on your personal circumstances.

National sight loss organisations

Blind Veterans UK

Blind Veterans UK provides free services and support to all vision-impaired Armed Forces and National Service veterans, no matter when they served or how they lost their sight. For more information, call **0800 389 7979** or visit **www.noonealone.org.uk**

British Blind Sport

British Blind Sport enables blind and partially sighted people to have the same opportunities as sighted people to access and enjoy sport and recreational activities in the UK. For more information, call **01926 42 42 47** visit **www.britishblindsport.org.uk**

Deafblind UK

Deafblind UK provides specialist services to deafblind people and those who have progressive sight and hearing loss acquired throughout their lives. For more information, call **0800 132 320** or visit **www.deafblind.org.uk**

Esme's Umbrella (Charles Bonnet Syndrome)

Esme's Umbrella is a charity working towards a greater awareness of Charles Bonnet Syndrome. For more information, call **0345 051 3925** or visit **www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk**

Guide Dogs

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association not only provides guide dogs but also offers a range of other mobility services, giving advice and supporting those with sight loss and their families, especially in maintaining or improving a person's ability to get out and about. For more information, call **0800 953 0113** or visit the website **www.guidedogs.org.uk**

The Macular Society

The Macular Society provide information and support to people affected by macular conditions, their family and friends. For more information, help and advice, call **0300 3030 111** or visit **www.macularsociety.org**

National Federation for the Blind

The National Federation for the Blind is an independent, campaigning pressure group. They campaign to improve the welfare and quality of daily life for all blind, partially sighted and deafblind people. For more information, call **0192 429 1313** or visit **www.nfbuk.org**

RNIB/Action for Blind People

RNIB offers practical and emotional support for people living with sight loss. For more information, call the Helpline on **0303 123 9999** or visit **www.rnib.org.uk**

SeeAbility

SeeAbility supports people with sight loss and multiple disabilities. They provide specialist support and accommodation services as well as raising awareness to help prevent avoidable sight loss for people with learning disabilities. For more information, call **01372 755 000** or visit **www.seeability.org**

Sense

Sense supports adults and children who are deafblind or have sensory impairments with additional needs. For more information, call **033 330 9256** or visit **www.sense.org**

Visionary

Visionary is a membership organisation for local sight loss charities, sometimes known as local societies or associations for blind and partially sighted people. For more information, visit **www.visionary.org.uk**

General charities

Age UK

Age UK helps older people by providing information, advice and support. For more information, call **0800 169 6565** or visit **www.ageuk.org.uk**

Carers UK

Carers UK supports people who look after older, ill or disabled family and friends. For more information, call **0808 808 7777** or visit **www.carersuk.org**

Diabetes UK

Diabetes UK supports people affected by, or at risk of, diabetes. For more information, call **0345 123 2399** or visit **www.diabetes.org.uk**

MIND

MIND provides information and support to people living with a mental health problem. For more information, call **0300 123 3393** or visit **www.mind.org.uk**

Relate

Relate counsellors can help people to come to terms with what's happening now and in the future. Counselling with Relate is open to all. For more information, call **0300 100 1234** or visit **www.relate.org.uk**

Samaritans

Samaritans is available round the clock, every day of the year. Talk to them off the record about whatever is getting to you. Call **116 123**, email **jo@samaritans.org** or to find your nearest branch visit **www.samaritans.org**

Other sources of information and support

- Citizens Advice **www.citizensadvice.org.uk**
- Your local GP
- NHS Direct
- Your local council
- Local sight loss charities



 We have written this booklet and hope that you have found it useful. If you have any comments, then please contact info@ukvisionstrategy.org.uk

This booklet is available to download from www.rnib.org.uk/sightlossinfo