

Visual Issues – Frequently Asked Questions

What are the roles of professionals in eye care?

Optometrist:

- usually based 'on the high street'
- undertakes the NHS Primary Eye Examination and prescription for corrective treatment
- is trained to detect certain general health conditions which show themselves in eye examinations
- may refer on to other professionals.

Optician (or dispensing optician):

- provides glasses (and sometimes contact lenses) based on a prescription supplied by an optometrist or ophthalmologist.

Ophthalmologist:

- diagnoses and treats disorders both medically and surgically. Generally speaking, ophthalmologists will be employed in hospital eye departments.

Orthoptist:

- works as part of multidisciplinary teams alongside optometrists, ophthalmologists and other health care professionals such as paediatricians
- diagnoses and provides therapy for eye muscle problems which can impair eye movement and binocular vision
- specialises in binocular vision and eye movement and involved in the treatment of conditions such as strokes, neurological disorders, glaucoma and cataract.

Behavioural Optometrist:

- concerned both with eye care and with how vision is processed into meaning
- uses both lens treatment and vision therapy (exercises) to treat visual and visual perceptual difficulties.

What are visual perceptual difficulties?

Visual perceptual difficulties are not about the **eye** being able to 'see' an image but how the **brain** processes the information that the eye has captured.

Is this the same as having dyslexia?

No. Some of the difficulties caused by visual perceptual difficulties can be similar to those experienced by people with dyslexia. However, visual perceptual difficulties can be treated. Some conditions seem to be more prevalent among the dyslexic population - but not all dyslexic people will have visual perceptual difficulties. You can have any of these conditions and not be dyslexic.

It is possible to have more than one visual difficulty. It is also possible to be unaware that you have a visual difficulty.

What should I do if I suspect someone is having this type of difficulty?

Ask – what does it feel like when you read?

Pay particular attention to the way they describe how it physically feels. For example they might say it makes their eyes feel scratchy or makes their head hurt.

Ask – what does it look like when you read?

For example, they might say they have to 'catch the words with their eyes' to stop the words moving. Or that it looks like the text is dissolving.

Ask – what seems to make it easier or more difficult?

Use different examples of text in different font types, sizes and background colours and talk about them.

Observe – do you notice any of these things?

- They seem to get watery eyes
- They rub their eyes
- They move their head or the page around
- They follow the text with their finger
- They seem to squint
- They need to move the page further away or have their head close to the page
- They need additional lighting or need the lights low

Observe – when reading out loud with you, do they do any of these things?

- Skip or omit words
- Miss the beginning or ends of words or punctuation marks
- Run words together and miss the gaps between
- Need to use a finger to follow the text
- Seem to find it more difficult or make more mistakes the longer they read for
- Mix up lines of text or columns of numbers, such as in a table

What should I do next?

When you have gathered information about all the symptoms, go to your Optometrist.

It is important that all of the information is passed onto the person carrying out any eye test. Make sure that you describe all the symptoms and difficulties that have been observed. Many of the difficulties might not show up in a standard eye-test. For example you might be able to read the line of text shown to you but you might not be able to sustain this over a full page of text without difficulties.

The person you go to must be a fully qualified Optometrist/Orthoptist. They must be able to assess for a number of different difficulties, many of which will give similar symptoms.

Following the eye test, an Optometrist might carry out additional tests, prescribe lenses and if necessary refer the person for further tests or treatment with an Orthoptist or other professional.

Further information

Dyslexia and Visual Issues by Dyslexia Scotland www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk/our-leaflets

Dyslexia Scotland has a list of opticians across Scotland who are qualified to carry out specialist eye tests. Please contact our Helpline on 0344 800 8484 or helpline@dyslexiascotland.org.uk for a copy.

www.dyslexiascotland.org.uk helpline@dyslexiascotland.org.uk 0344 800 8484

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