

Sight Conditions

What is Visual Impairment?

If a person's vision has deteriorated to a certain level, they may choose to register as visually impaired. Depending on the severity of their vision loss they will either be registered as sight impaired (previously "partially sighted") or severely sight impaired (previously "blind").

An eye specialist (ophthalmologist) will measure a person's visual acuity (ability to see detail at a distance) and field of vision (how much they can see from the side of their eye when looking straight ahead) to help determine whether a person is eligible to be certified as sight impaired or severely sight impaired.





Benefits of Registration

Being registered sight impaired or severely sight impaired requires a person to receive the Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI). The CVI has three main functions:

- It qualifies a person to be registered with their local council as sight impaired or severely sight impaired. The local council have a duty to contact people to offer registration and to see if they need help with day-to-day tasks.
- The CVI records important information about the cause of the sight loss. It helps the NHS to identify any trends in certain eye conditions and helps with planning services.

The Terminology

Vision impaired or visually impaired (VI) is the general term used for blind and partially sighted people, or people experiencing sight loss. The terms “severely sight impaired” and “sight impaired” are medical terms and are generally used in the administration of certification. The terms “blind” and “partially sighted” are more generally used in everyday conversations.

However, how someone chooses to describe themselves in relation to their eye condition is very individual and the term they use will depend on their personal preference.

Types of Sight Loss

Congenital vision loss

Congenital refers to a condition that someone is born with.

Acquired vision loss

Acquired means that a person experiences sight loss later in life. This could be due to ageing or an accident or illness.

Mixed vision loss

Someone born with a congenital condition may acquire further sight loss later in life.

Common Eye Conditions

Everyone is different and manages their sight loss condition in a unique way. Sight loss conditions can vary significantly, e.g. total blindness, minimal light, better vision in light or dark areas, long distance, short distance narrow and peripheral; and that's only highlighting a few! Never make assumptions of what people can and cannot see, each blind and partially sighted person's background to sight loss is different.

Loss of central vision

This type of sight loss typically occurs from damage to the very centre of the retina, known as the macular. Losing central vision will often feel like a blurred or warped area in a person's central vision. As this gets worse, the blur spots will turn into dark or blank spots.

Loss of peripheral vision

When a person loses peripheral vision, they will see things in the centre clearer and brighter as compared to things on the side. This is often known as tunnel vision – only seeing things in a small circle directly in front of someone.

Blurred or cloudy vision

Blurred vision is the inability to see things clearly, like looking through frosted glass and therefore limiting things that people can see. People may find it harder to see in low light and lights may seem really bright in other instances. People can get blurred or cloudy vision in both eyes or just in one eye.

Night blindness

Night blindness is the inability to see well in low light conditions, such as night time and dark places like cinemas.

Common Sight Conditions

Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)

The macular, which is part of the retina at the back of the eye, contains millions of cone cells. These cone cells allow you to see fine detail for things like reading, writing and recognising colours. When someone develops AMD, the cone cells become damaged and stop working as they should. It affects the central vision, which can become distorted or blurry. Eventually a blank patch may appear.

Glaucoma and Retinitis Pigmentosa

Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP) is the name given to a group of inherited eye conditions called retinal dystrophies. These conditions cause a slow loss of vision, beginning with night vision and peripheral (side) vision and eventually affecting central, colour and reading vision.

Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic Retinopathy is a complication of diabetes that damages the tiny blood vessels that deliver blood to the retinas. The condition can cause blindness if left undiagnosed and untreated. Symptoms of diabetic retinopathy include the blurring of vision, 'blind spots' or 'floaters' appearing on certain parts of the retina.

Cataract

Cataracts are a common eye condition in which the lens inside the eye gradually becomes less transparent with age. Over time, a cataract can become worse, making vision cloudier, but it is usually treatable with a straightforward operation. Cataracts cause an overall blurring and haziness of vision. It often appears as if everything is out of focus.