

# Devon in Sight Eye Condition Fact Sheet 19

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## Low Vision Assessment

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### Introduction

**Low vision is when - even with glasses or contact lenses – you are unable to see in sufficient detail to enable you to easily perform daily activities. If you have severe low vision, you may be eligible to be certified as having visual impairment (partially sighted) or severe visual impairment (blind).**

A common myth is that people who are legally 'blind' cannot see anything, but being visually impaired does not necessarily mean that you have no sight. Even people who are certified as being severely visually impaired/blind often have useful vision, and there are many helpful gadgets to help them do most daily tasks.

### Who is affected by low vision?

Although most people with low vision are over 60, anyone who has a sight-threatening condition may develop low vision. The most common causes of visual impairment in the UK are:

- Age-related Macular Degeneration
- Glaucoma
- Cataracts.

Conditions that may affect younger people include:

- Congenital Macular Degeneration
- Diabetic Retinopathy
- some inherited eye diseases, such as Retinitis Pigmentosa.

## What are the symptoms of low vision?

The symptoms of low vision depend on which eye condition causes it. The most common eye condition that leads to sight loss is age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which usually affects people over the age of 60. This affects your central vision, meaning you have difficulty reading or recognising people's faces.

There are some other conditions which have a similar affect on your vision that affect younger people, but they are much less common than AMD. Glaucoma does not cause symptoms in the early stages, but when advanced it causes tunnel vision, which leads to difficulty seeing things around you. Cataract causes things to appear misty. Diabetic retinopathy does not cause any symptoms in the early stages, but may cause shapes floating in your vision or blurred or patchy vision. If a blood vessel bursts in your eye it may cause sudden vision loss.

## How do you treat low vision?

The aim of treatment for the sight-threatening conditions, is to reduce their impact on your sight, to preserve your sight for as long as possible.

## Tips for living with low vision

If you have low vision, there are many things that you can do to make life easier. These range from high tech gadgets such as talking microwaves and apps on phones to help you read, to low tech equipment such as 'bump-ons' to put on dials (such as your oven) and level indicators to help you know when a cup is full of liquid.

Simple things like having good lighting and contrast at home make things easier to see. For example:

- If you are pouring a cup of tea or coffee into a white mug, pour the tea or coffee into the mug first, and then the milk.
- You may find it easier to have dark plates to eat your food off, particularly if the food you are eating is lighter in colour, such as rice or pasta.
- Having a dark toilet seat on a white toilet can help you see where the toilet is and whether the seat is up or down.

Lighting is very important, particularly as you get older, and it is the position of the light as well as its brightness that is important. The closer the light is to you, the more effective it will be, so use a standard or angle-poise lamp to help you see things, rather than just a ceiling lamp.

### **What NHS support is available for low vision?**

A visit to the opticians is a good place to start. If they find a problem, you'll be referred to hospital to see an ophthalmologist (eye doctor).

Your GP will be kept informed, and will give you extra support and advice if you need it.

If the eye doctor finds that your vision can't be improved by glasses or contact lenses, or medical or surgical treatment, you may be referred to a low-vision clinic.

At the clinic, staff can advise you about managing at home, getting out and about and help with reading and writing.

They will also assess you to see if you are eligible to be registered as partially sighted or blind.

### **Low vision aids**

If you need to magnify things there are several options available. 'Low vision aids' are available to borrow, free of charge from your local low vision service. These range from simple magnifying glasses, to more complex telescopes to magnify things that are far away. If you would like to try these, ask your optometrist for details of how to get into contact with your local low vision service. In some areas, they will come to your home to give you advice tailored to your circumstances.

Smartphones and tablets can also be used to magnify things electronically or read text out to you. You can also subscribe to talking book or newspaper services or use a digital voice-activated assistant.

## Low vision information, advice and support

RNIB:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/young-people-leaving-home/help-low-vision>

Macular Society: <https://www.macularsociety.org/>

International Glaucoma Association: <https://glaucoma.uk/>

Guide Dogs: <https://www.guidedogs.org.uk/>

## What to do next?

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms or your sight loss deteriorates, please contact your GP/Optician/Accident & Emergency Department at your local Hospital.

**If you need any further advice call our Helpline: 01392 876 666**

**Devon in Sight** is a member of the **Helpline Partnership Community**.

## Credit

We would like to thank the **Royal College of Optometrists** for their kind permission to reproduce this information.

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## Further Support Available from Devon in Sight

- **Information, Advice and Guidance**
- **Demonstrations of Low Vision Aids & Daily Living Equipment**
- **Assistive Technology Solutions**
- **Our holistic needs assessment (Sight Loss MOT)**
- **Training for people with central vision loss (Skills for Seeing)**

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**Devon in Sight** is committed to producing Information, Advice & Guidance Resources that are clear, accurate, evidence-based, up-to-date and easy to use. We have a robust information production process

based on best practice to ensure that information we produce meets the needs of people who are blind or partially sighted and their family and friends.

**Devon in Sight** is not a medical organisation; therefore we can only provide general information that is not intended to be a substitute for a proper medical assessment. Our information is not intended to be used for individual cases. If you have a specific question about your eye condition, we recommend that you consult an eye care professional.

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Our Information, Advice & Guidance Resources were correct at the time of writing. However, due to research and medical advances, the content may not be completely up to date.

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### Devon in Sight Contact Information



**Helpline 01392 876 666**  
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