

Devon in Sight Eye Condition Fact Sheet 7

Charles Bonnet Syndrome

Introduction

Charles Bonnet syndrome (CBS) is a common condition among people with poor vision. It is when you experience silent visual hallucinations. These can seem real and can be confusing or frightening. They are caused by the brain trying to 'fill in' detail in the blind areas. The hallucinations usually decrease or disappear over time.

Who is affected by Charles Bonnet syndrome?

Anyone, including children, who has an eye condition that results in sight loss can develop Charles Bonnet syndrome. However, it is more common in older people as they are more likely to have conditions, such as age-related macular degeneration, cataract, glaucoma or diabetic eye disease, which result in sight loss.

What are the symptoms of Charles Bonnet syndrome?

We don't know why sight loss leads to hallucinations, but it is thought that the brain fills the gaps in your vision by releasing new images or old images that it has stored. This can start in the weeks following your sight loss. You may worry that you have Alzheimer's disease or a mental health problem, but Charles Bonnet syndrome is a result of the sight loss and is not associated with any other health problem.

Symptoms include:

Visual hallucinations can be very vivid and include known and unknown people and animals.

Distorted vision rooms may appear to change size and shape, making it difficult to get around.

How do you treat Charles Bonnet syndrome?

Currently, there is no cure for Charles Bonnet Syndrome and no specific medication has been shown to stop the hallucinations. Some medications that are designed to treat epilepsy, Parkinson's disease and dementia have proved effective for people who are severely affected. Usually, the hallucinations will become less frequent and vivid and may stop altogether. However, they may restart if there is another sudden, significant loss of vision.

There are some things you can try to help relieve your symptoms:

- make sure you're well rested and are getting enough sleep at night
- change the lighting to make the room brighter or darker or move to another room or location
- move your eyes from left to right without moving your head . Do this every second 15 times without moving your head, then pause for a few seconds and repeat four or five times
- stare at the hallucination and blink rapidly or reach out to touch the vision
- move somewhere else and do something else.

Charles Bonnet syndrome information, advice and support

The Macular Society runs a buddy service for people affected by Charles Bonnet syndrome. Telephone the helpline during office hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm) 0300 30 30 111.

Macular Society Website:

<https://www.macularsociety.org/macular-buddies>

Esme's Umbrella Website: <http://www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk/>

NHS Choices Website:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/charles-bonnet-syndrome/>

RNIB Website:

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/eye-health/eye-conditions/charles-bonnet-syndrome-cbs>

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.

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.

Devon in Sight Contact Information



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