Information NOW
Information for people in Newcastle upon Tyne

Sight Loss and Visual Impairments

It is important to keep your eyes healthy and attend check ups with an optician, every 2 years. Your eyesight can change over time. Glasses or contact lenses may help you. You can find out more about eye tests in our page on **Opticians.**

Living with sight loss

Having sight loss doesn't mean you have to stop enjoying life. There are lots of ways you can make the most of your existing sight. It could be as simple as buying reading glasses or making a few changes to your home. In some cases, specialised equipment can also make things a lot easier. And it's important to tell friends and family so they understand and can offer their support.

Depending on your level of sight loss, you might find you need help with some everyday activities like:

- reading
- recognising faces or street signs
- telling the time
- using a computer screen, keyboard or keypad
- using the phone and taking down messages.

Causes of sight loss or visual impairment

There are health conditions that can effect your vision. Speak to your doctor or optician for advice. Conditions include:

Cataracts are when the lens inside your eye becomes cloudy, instead of clear. If you have a cataract you may find that your vision seems misty and blurred, especially in strong sunlight. Cataracts are often age-related. Most people aged over 60 years old will have some clouding of the lens, which may or may not affect their vision. Cataracts can be treated with surgery. The cloudy lens is removed under local anaesthetic and replaced with an artificial clear lens. You can usually go home the same day.

Glaucoma is when the optic nerve, at the back of the eye is damaged. This nerve connects your eye to your brain. It is caused by a build-up of pressure in the eye. Regular check ups with an optician can help to catch and treat it early. Glaucoma can run in the family. Tell your optician if a close relative has glaucoma. Glaucoma UK has more information about living with glaucoma.

Macular Degeneration is when fluid leaks behind the retina of your eye. It causes a black spot to appear in the centre of your vision. People with this condition can find daily activities difficult, such as reading, watching television, and recognising people. This is usually an age related eye condition. Equipment and aids can help if your vision is affected. Depending on the type of degeneration you may be able to receive some treatment to help. Macular Society has a free telephone helpline, local support group and online information about living with Macular degeneration.

Diabetic Retinopathy is a complication from Diabetes. It's caused by high blood sugar levels, which can damage the back of your eye, if left untreated. Regular eye tests are important to look after your eyes. Diabetes UK has more advice on how to look after your diabetes.

Brain injury or stroke can affect the blood supply to your eyes which can effect your eye sight.

Inherited retinal dystrophy is a group of rare, genetic disorders that involve a breakdown and loss of cells in the retina. This is the light sensitive tissue that lines the back of the eye. Common symptoms include difficulty seeing at night and a loss of side (peripheral) vision.

Registering your vision impairment as a disability

When you are assessed by an ophthalmologist at hospital as being visually impaired you will receive a Certificate of Vision Impairment. A copy of this certificate will be sent to you, Adult Social Care at Newcastle City Council, the Department of Health and your GP.

Adult Social Care's Sensory Service will contact you when they receive your Certificate of Vision Impairment. They will arrange to visit you and assess your sensory needs. They can help you to register as blind or partially sighted with Newcastle City Council. This helps you access some benefits and concessionary travel.

You will be registered on one of the 3 registers depending on your sensory needs. The registers:

- severely sight impaired (blind)
- sight impaired (partially sighted)
- dual sensory loss (hearing and vision loss)

Why register?

There are some very significant advantages to getting registered. Firstly, it can make life more affordable by enabling you to claim a wide range of concessions. These include a half-price TV Licence, help with NHS costs, help with your Council Tax bill and tax allowances, leisure discounts and free public transport. Which concessions you are entitled to depends on whether you are registered as severely sight impaired or sight impaired.

If you are registered as **sight impaired** you are entitled to receive:

- a railcard and other rail travel concessions
- free access to **BTs including you scheme**

- protection by the Disability Discrimination Act

If you are registered as **seriously sight impaired** you are entitled to receive items above and:

- blind person's personal income tax allowance
- free NHS sight tests
- a reduction of 50% on the **television licence fee**
- car parking concessions under the **Blue Badge Scheme**
- free postage on items marked 'articles for the blind'
- membership to local travel schemes, such as **TaxiCard**

You may also be entitled to receive:

- free permanent loan of radios, cassette players and television sound receivers from the **British Wireless for the Blind Fund** contact **Newcastle City Library**

For more information on the registration process and the benefits of registering, contact **RNIB.**

Aids and equipment

There are a number of practical aids to help you with daily living. For examples: talking alarm clocks and watches, portable doorbells, liquid level indicators, task lighting, bath water level guards and iron guards. You can buy equipment These kinds of aids are available from:

- **Disability North** where you can try out equipment
- **Disabled Living Foundation** have a living made easy website where you can search and buy aids, equipment to help with daily living.

Read more about useful equipment on InformationNOW

Help to live at home

Making some changes or adaptations to your home can help to make it easier.

Home care can help you with personal care and daily tasks

Carer support

Adult Social Care

Speak to Adult Social CarePoint at Newcastle City Council for more information. They can talk to you to find out how you are managing at home. They can have a conversation with you to understand your situation. To find out what's working well and where they can help. They can put you in touch with local services. If you need one, they can arrange a Needs Assessment, to find out if they can help you further. Your needs might change so you may need a review of your

needs from time to time.

Getting out and about

Concessionary travel

Shopmobility

Vocal Eyes finds theatres and museums with audio-described performances, tours, or buildings and places with audio-described **introductions**

AccessAble gives you information about how accessible a place/building is.

In Your Pocket is a voice operated smartphone and media player, specifically designed for visually impaired people. In collaboration with RNIB and & O2 this app uses only a few voice commands to make calls, listen to books or get the newspaper read to you.

Braille is a language that is designed for visually impaired people and helps with literacy.

Accessible Information Standard

The Accessible Information Standard is a UK law to make sure that people who have a disability, impairment or sensory loss are given information they can easily read or understand. Health and social care services must find out your information and communication needs make sure you get support the way you need it in an accessible format.

For example you may need digital information that will work correctly with a screen reader or some information in braille.

Read more about Accessible information

Reading Assistance online

InformationNOW has accessibility software built in to the website. This means that InformationNOW can be read aloud to you. The colour, size and contrast of the web pages can be changed to make the website easier to read for people with visual impairments. To use this feature click the right hand corner of the page marked '**Show Accessibility Options'.** The Recite Me toolbar will open up and you can tailor the website to suit you best. You don't need to download anything to your computer to use this software and it's free.

BrowseAloud reads web pages aloud for people who find it difficult to read online. Browsealoud makes using the Internet easier for people who have:

- low literacy and reading skills
- English as a second language
- dyslexia
- mild visual impairments

Listening Books is a registered charity that offers audio books to those with a disability that are downloadable into an App or MP3CD available by post for a small fee.

Local Information

Eye Clinic Liaison Service is based at the Royal Victoria Infirmary (RVI). They can offer emotional support, advice and information at any stage of sight loss. You don't need to be referred from another health professional and you don't necessarily need an appointment. You may also be referred to other services.

Guide Dogs Newcastle offer a My Guide service in the North East. This service is designed to help you gain confidence, increase your independence and make new friends including joining new activities in your community. A volunteer will be selected and matched to your needs to help you get around your area.

Newcastle Vision Support provide practical support for people with sight loss by offering services such as social clubs, walking clubs, IT training on iPads, tablets, computers and accessibility options, benefit advice and support at assessments.

North Regional Association for Sensory Support (NRASS) provides a free advocacy scheme for people with hearing and sight loss. Their advocates are people who can support or represent you when dealing with everyday problems or in times of crisis. They can offer you support with information on how you can stand up for your rights, and they can be your 'voice' if you don't have the confidence to stand up for yourself in formal situations.

Macular Society provides an advice and information helpline for those affected by macular disease and there is a support group that meets in Newcastle monthly. See our Events and Activities page for further information.

Other Useful Information

- **Protected Telephone Services and Priority Repairs** are available to help support people with long term conditions and disabilities. This helps to make sure that your phone line is working, so you can use it to stay in contact with others and in emergencies.
- **RNIB Connect Radio,** the UK's radio station for blind and partially sighted people. It's available on Freeview 730 and online www.rnibconnectradio.org.uk
- **The Cinemas Exhibitors' Association (CEA) Card** helps to ensure cinemas make reasonable adjustments for you if you need them because of a disability. With the card you can claim a free ticket for a carer or person accompanying you to the cinema. The card costs £6 . You can apply if you receive Disability Living Allowance; Attendance Allowance; Personal Independence Payment or Armed Forces Independence Payment or are registered as blind.
- **Seeing Ear** runs an online library which provides books in a flexible format that can be downloaded by library members with a visual impairment.
- **Radioechoes.com** is a website offering over 85,000 Old Time Radio programs available to be instantly listened to or downloaded for free
- **Infosound** is an information service for vision-impaired (blind and partially-sighted) people in Great Britain. They cover any subject that deals with the practical aspects of living with sight loss. They continuously broadcast information around the clock and also provide an on-

demand service where individual audio features can be selected and heard.
- **British Blind Sport** aims to give blind and partially sighted people the opportunity to participate in a range of sports.
- **The Braillists Foundation** is a community connecting Braille readers with Braille technology developers and funders. They have Braille courses, a Facebook group and a discussion forum.
- **Sight Loss Councils** are campaign groups of blind & partially sighted people working to drive transformative change & raise awareness across the UK.

Please note – The content on this website is provided for general information only, and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your own doctor or any other health care professional. If you are feeling unwell, make an appointment to see your GP or contact NHS 111. In an emergency, dial 999.

Last updated: January 8, 2025

Useful Organisations

Disability North

Email: reception@disabilitynorth.org.uk

Website: www.disabilitynorth.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 2840480

Address: The Dene Centre, NE3 1PH

Newcastle Vision Support

Email: info@newcastlevisionsupport.org.uk

Website: http://newcastlevisionsupport.org.uk/

Telephone: 0191 232 7292

Address: Suite 1, 6th Floor West A, NE1 8AF

Adult Social CarePoint at Newcastle City Council

Email: ASCP@newcastle.gov.uk

Website: http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/AdultSocialCare

Telephone: 0191 278 7878

Address: Adult Social CarePoint Newcastle City Council, NE4 9LU

Disabled Living Foundation (DLF)

Email: info@dlf.org.uk

Website: http://www.livingmadeeasy.org.uk/

Telephone: 0207 289 6111

Address: Shaw Trust, B69 2DG

RNIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People)

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Website: https://www.rnib.org.uk

Telephone: 0303 123 9999

Address: The Grimaldi Building, N1 9JE

British Wireless for the Blind Fund

Email: info@blind.org.uk

Website: www.blind.org.uk

Telephone: 01622 754 757

Address: Gabriel House, ME4 4QR

Eye Clinic Liaison Service

Website: https://www.newcastle-hospitals.nhs.uk/services/eye-department/eye-clinic-liaison-service/

Telephone: 0191 282 0221

Address: Newcastle Eye Centre, NE1 4LP

North Regional Association for Sensory Support (NRASS)

Email: office@nrass.org.uk

Website: www.nrass.org

Address: The Pinetree Centre, DH3 2TD

Cinemas Exhibitors Association (CEA) Card

Email: info@ceacard.co.uk

Website: www.ceacard.co.uk

Telephone: 01244 526016

Address: CEA Card, CH7 5BW

Calibre Audio Library

Email: enquiries@calibre.org.uk

Website: www.calibre.org.uk

Telephone: 01296 432 339

Address: Aylesbury, HP22 5XQ

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk

Action for Blind People

Email: helpline@rnib.org.uk

Website: www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk

Telephone: RNIB Helpline: 0303 123 9999

Guide Dogs

Email: guidedogs@guidedogs.org.uk

Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk

Telephone: 0118 983 5555

Address: Hillfields, RG7 3YG

RadioEchoes.com

Email: support@radioechoes.com

Website: http://www.radioechoes.com

Motability

Website: www.motability.co.uk

Telephone: 0300 456 4566

Guide Dogs Newcastle

Email: newcastle@guidedogs.org.uk

Website: www.guidedogs.org.uk

Telephone: 0345 143 0220

Address: Guide Dogs, NE7 7TZ

Glaucoma UK

Email: h.morrow@iga.org.uk

Website: https://glaucoma.uk/

Telephone: 01233 648 164

Address: High Point Business Village, TN24 8DH

Living Made Easy

Website: https://livingmadeeasy.org.uk/

Address: Living Made Easy – Shaw Trust, B69 2D6

Blue Badge Scheme at Newcastle City Council

Website: http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/parking-roads-and-transport/parking/disabled-parking-and-blue-badge-scheme

Telephone: 0191 278 7878

Address: Blue Badge Scheme, NE1 8QH

Macular Society

Email: help@macularsociety.org

Website: https://www.macularsociety.org/

Address: PO Box 1870, SP10 9AD

BrowseAloud

Email: info@browsealoud.com

Website: www.browsealoud.com

Telephone: 028 9442 8105

Address: Lucas Exchange, BT41 2RU

TV Licensing

Email: enquiries@tvlicensing.co.uk

Website: www.tvlicensing.co.uk

Telephone: 0300 790 6165

Address: Customer Relations, DL98 1TL

British Blind Sport

Email: info@britishblindsport.org.uk

Website: https://britishblindsport.org.uk/

Telephone: 01926 424 247

Address: 19 Coventry Road , CV32 7JN

Difference North East

Email: info@differencenortheast.org.uk

Website: www.differencenortheast.org.uk

Telephone: 07498 317352

Address: 40 Rothwell Road, NE3 1UA

Sight Loss Councils – Tyne and Wear

Website: https://www.sightlosscouncils.org.uk/meet-the-councils/tyne-and-wear/

Telephone: 0208 995 0880

Address: Head Office, WC1N 3AR

Related Articles

Home adaptations, equipment and aids

Telecare, telehealth and personal alarm systems

Falls prevention

Carer's Allowance

Disability Living Allowance (DLA)

Opticians

Stroke

Diabetes

Deaf and hard of hearing

Eye Casualty

Telephones

Help with shopping and prescriptions

Making your computer or mobile device easier to use

Personal Independence Payment (PIP)

Living with a long-term health condition or disability

Motability: car scheme for disabled people.

Accessible venues in Newcastle

Accessible information