

# Disability Insight

Take a look around you

## World Sight Day 9<sup>th</sup> October 2014

### 5 facts you need to know about sight loss

- 50,000 people in Northern Ireland have sight loss
- 50% of sight loss is preventable
- 1 in 6 over 80 year olds will have sight loss
- Get your sight test done – it helps to prevent sight loss
- You can make a difference for people with sight loss by producing your information in accessible formats.

### About sight loss

Visual impairment is when a person has sight loss that cannot be fully corrected using glasses or contact lenses. In the UK, of the 2 million people with sight loss only 365,000 are registered as blind or partially sighted.

Common causes include: sight loss from birth; an inherited condition that gets worse as you get older; the result of an accident; or an illness such as diabetic retinopathy.

Common eye conditions include: Age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, retinitis pigmentosa (RP). You can find out more [here](#). There is a broad range of other eye conditions, some of which may be rare. You can find out more [here](#).

### How does sight loss affect a person?

Click on any of the links from the NHS Choices website below to listen to people living with sight loss tell their story:

[Macular Degeneration – Lee’s Story \(2min 27sec\)](#)

[Glaucoma – Aruna’s Story \(1min 34 sec\)](#)

[Diabetic Retinopathy – Tim’s Story \(3min 04 sec\)](#)

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The experience of sight loss will of course be unique to each person. However, common barriers that people with sight loss come up against include:

- information is often not available to people with sight problems in a way that they can read it
- if a person can no longer drive, getting around can be more difficult, in particular when environments have not been designed in an inclusive way.

Aids for everyday living help many people with sight loss to continue living independently. These include, for instance, use of a white cane or a guide dog; use of special software to enlarge text on screen or computerised speech systems (which read text from screen to user); and talking products in the kitchen (such as scales or clocks).

### **What you can do for yourself – preventing sight loss**

#### 1. Regular eye tests

Get your eyes tested once every two years. An eye examination can often pick up the first signs of an eye condition before you notice any changes in your vision. All staff who are users of a visual display unit (such as a monitor) are entitled to a free eye test. Contact Human Resources for further details.

#### 2. Stop smoking

Smoking can double the risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, the UK's leading cause of sight loss. The link is as strong as the link between smoking and lung cancer. Speak to your GP about stopping smoking.

#### 3. Eat healthily and watch your weight

Eating a diet low in saturated fats but rich in green leafy vegetables, as well as eating oranges, kiwis, nuts, seeds and oily fish may help delay the progression of some eye conditions. It is important to maintain a healthy weight. Obesity can increase the risk of developing diabetes, which in turn can cause sight loss.

#### 4. Keep your eyes covered in the sun

UVA and UVB rays in sunlight can harm your eyes and may increase the risk of cataracts and AMD. Wearing sunglasses, glasses or contact lenses with built in UV filter will protect your eyes. Only buy sunglasses that have a CE mark or carry British Standard BSEN 1836:1997.

## 5. Safety first

DIY causes thousands of eye related injuries each year. Always wear safety goggles to protect your eyes from flying debris and fine particles. Sport (especially racquet-based sports) also causes lots of eye related injuries each year. Investing in a good pair of protective sports goggles will help prevent serious damage to your eyes.

### **How you can support a colleague with sight loss**

- A person with sight problems often uses their memory of the surroundings and their remaining sight – remember not to move things around or leave things in places that could cause an accident.
- When you are speaking to a person with sight problems introduce yourself and make sure the person knows you are speaking to them. Talk to them directly, not through a third party.
- If you are going to guide them, let them take your arm, don't grab theirs. Mention any potential hazards that lie ahead and say where they are. Don't walk away without saying you are leaving.
- If you are unsure whether somebody with a sight problem would like some help just ask the person.

When you are producing information, adhering to accessible formats standards (including use of Arial font size 14, left aligned text, no italics or underlining, avoiding capitals) will make a real difference for people with sight loss. Keep this in mind also when you are organising meetings. You will also need to make sure you choose venues that are accessible for people with sight loss (including with clear and tactile signage, public transport routes and disabled car parking).

As a **line manager**, you need to be mindful of your duty to make reasonable adjustments. You need to speak to both the individual and Human Resources to ensure that these meet the needs of your staff member. For a person with sight loss this may involve, for example, providing equipment or particular software, or making changes to the work environment or to a job description to reassign some duties to other staff.

### **For staff who are carers of a person with sight loss**

If you care for a person with sight loss, whether a child or an adult, a range of organisations offer support. You may find it useful to contact [CarersNI](#) or check a

directory of organisations maintained by RNIB, as a starting point:

[www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk/](http://www.sightlinedirectory.org.uk/)

### For staff with sight loss

The RNIB Eye Care Liaison Officer (ECLO) service offers emotional and practical support at the point of diagnosis of an eye condition. This service is available at the 12 main eye clinics and through opticians across the five Health and Social Care Trusts of NI. You can access further details on the service from [RNIB](http://RNIB.org.uk).

We recommend that you consider speaking to your line manager, Human Resources and Occupational Health about any particular requirements you may have relating to your sight loss. If you declare that you have a disability, your employer will be better able to support you and meet your needs. You will also be protected under the Disability Discrimination Act including its particular duty for your employer to make reasonable adjustments.

### Sources and further reading

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Visual-impairment/](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Visual-impairment/)

[www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk](http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk)

[www.rnib.org.uk/](http://www.rnib.org.uk/)

Information for Carers

[RNIB Resources for Parents of Blind or Partially Sighted Children](http://RNIB.org.uk/Parents-of-Blind-or-Partially-Sighted-Children)

[www.blindchildrenuk.org](http://www.blindchildrenuk.org)

<http://angeleyesni.org>



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