



BIOS | BRITISH AND IRISH
ORTHOPTIC SOCIETY

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**Visual inattention following Stroke or
Brain Injury**



Visual inattention following Stroke or Brain Injury

What is visual inattention?

Visual inattention is a condition experienced by people who have had a stroke or a brain injury. It is when a person ignores everything to one side of them. It usually affects people who have had a stroke or brain injury to the right side of their brain and they ignore people and objects to the left side (left sided visual inattention). Right sided visual inattention is less common and affects people in different ways.

This condition is also known as visual neglect or spatial inattention. These conditions are one and the same thing.

People with visual inattention can have more generalised neglect whereby they ignore half of their body, mainly to the left side.

Visual inattention can vary in severity from very mild to severe.

This condition may be found in people with visual field loss (hemianopia) following stroke or brain injury. Where these two conditions exist together the person will ignore the same side where the visual field has been lost. Please refer to the leaflet “Visual Field loss following Stroke or Brain Injury” for further information.

What are the signs that a person may have visual inattention?

- People often deny they have a problem with their vision and are unaware of their visual impairment, thereby making them at risk of falling.
- They may be unable to look straight ahead whilst talking and may keep their head and body turned to the side of the stroke. They will be able to hear you but will not see you until you move to their non-affected side.
- They may be startled when someone suddenly talks or appears from their affected side.
- They may only eat half of the food on their plate.
- They may find reading difficult as they will ignore the words on the affected side making the print confusing.
- They may bump into objects on their affected side.

- They may veer off to one side whilst walking or lose their sense of direction.
- They may only wash and dress one side of their body.



People with visual inattention generally stay in hospital for longer as it can cause problems with their rehabilitation

How will visual inattention affect someone following a stroke?

- They may have an increased risk of falls.
- People may become disorientated and easily alarmed when objects suddenly appear from the affected side.
- May affect general mobility and independence.
- As they are unaware of the visual inattention they may not complain of any symptoms.

How is visual inattention diagnosed?

There are a variety of simple tests and observations that can be carried out by your orthoptist or occupational therapist.

What are the treatment options for visual inattention?

The mechanism for recovery is complex and is still not fully understood. In many people visual inattention can have a good recovery. In people where visual inattention is still present it is important for them to have continued support and input from a variety of healthcare professionals. As visual inattention is often a problem with “looking” rather than “seeing” and the aim of treatment is to encourage the person to look and scan to the affected side.

There are various strategies that may help to encourage people with visual inattention to look (scan) to the affected side:

- Teaching the person to scan to the affected side (moving eyes and head)
- Scanning exercises

- Involving family/friends and carers' to encourage to look to the affected side
- Reading exercises with typoscopes/coloured markers/line guides



- Puzzles / games such as dot to dot, word searches, spot the difference.
- Range of web-based therapy and apps (please refer to the "Web based therapy for visual field loss and vision neglect" leaflet).
- Relatives and carers should approach from the non-affected side
- Encourage visitors to sit on the affected side.
- Remove clutter around the home to reduce risk of falls.
- Place all important objects on the unaffected side such as call button, drinks, glasses etc.
- Encourage them to get out of bed on the unaffected side.

- Try to reduce distractions when encouraging them to look to the affected side.

Driving and visual inattention

Initially following a stroke, a person is not permitted to drive for one month.

If a person has **persistent visual inattention or hemianopia** (visual field loss), the DVLA states that **they are not accepted as safe for driving**. The orthoptist will be able to offer advice on whether you are eligible to return to driving.

If in doubt consult the DVLA website for the latest information:

www.dft.gov.uk

Where can I find more information about visual inattention?

Additional help and advice is available from:

British and Irish Orthoptic Society

Website: www.orthoptics.org.uk

The Stroke Association

Website: www.stroke.org.uk

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see www.orthoptics.org.uk/ for more information