Orthoptic Assessment

Visual Field Loss
After Stroke or Brain Injury
What is an orthoptist?

Orthoptists are eye care professionals who specialise in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of eye problems. They specialise in assessing patients with visual field loss and eye movement problems. Orthoptists work with patients of all ages. Many tests used by the orthoptist are non-verbal and therefore accurate responses can still be obtained even if a communication problem exists after stroke.

Benefits of an orthoptic assessment

Orthoptists can provide patients/carers with an explanation of their visual problems. They may be able to offer advice and treatments that can aid the patient’s rehabilitation.

Where do Orthoptist’s work?

There are orthoptists based in Hospitals, working within the eye clinic. Orthoptists also work in the community health setting.

How do I get an assessment?

In the event that you have noticed a significant change in your vision, double vision or a loss of vision to one side then ask one of the staff involved in your health care to notify your local Orthoptist.
Visual field loss

It is not unusual for a patient to lose half of their visual field after a stroke, creating a blind side either to the right or left.

The vision loss occurs to the same side as the limb weakness. If the right side of the brain has been affected then the field loss will be on the left side.

A field loss to the left means that a person will be unable to see objects on their left hand side or communicate effectively with people positioned to their defective side. If they move their head and eyes to the left they can bring the object or person into their field of view. This is not due to damage of the eyes but the visual pathway in the brain.

How could this affect you?

People with a field loss might bump into things on the affected side, have problems reading and crossing the road.

Before stroke

After stroke

Example of right visual field loss
When reading

- Draw a coloured mark or use a marker down the blind side of the page so that you know where the beginning or end of the line is
- Use you finger to follow the print or a book mark
- Some people find a typoscope helpful. This is a piece of black card with a window cut in it like a letterbox. Others prefer using an “L” shaped piece of card.
- Some people find it easier to read by turning the page vertically or moving the book during reading.
- An orthoptist can advise if reading aids are appropriate for you.

All these techniques need practice and patience.

Typoscope

Coloured Markers
Driving and visual field loss

- Anyone who has had a stroke or Transient Ischemic Attack (TIA or mini stroke) must refrain from driving for at least one month. If you have frequent TIA's then you will be advised not to drive until you have had 3 months free from attacks.

- You can drive again after one month if you doctor deems you are fit.

- If after one month you are not fit to drive you must inform the DVLA.

- Once the DVLA have been notified you must refrain from driving. An assessment will be arranged by the DVLA to see if you are fit to drive.

The orthoptist or other stroke unit staff can provide information regarding “Driving after Stroke”.

Recovery

Unfortunately visual field loss may not recover, however generally if recovery does occur it usually takes place in the first or second month after the stroke. Any field loss present after this time may be permanent. You may however feel that your sight improves as you adapt to the defect over time.
Partial sight registration

It is possible to be registered partially sighted if your field loss persists. Please contact your orthoptist if you wish to discuss this in more detail.

Advice and treatment

- You may benefit from turning your head and eyes to the blind side to make better use of the seeing field.
- Relatives and carers should approach from your non-affected side.
- Move furniture, bedside cabinet to the non-affected side to prevent accidents.
- You may feel more comfortable to position the television or food and drink towards your unaffected side.
- Try and get out of bed on the non-affected side.
- Look around to the affected side as much as possible.
- It may be possible to centralise your field with the use of prism, placed on your glasses. This form of treatment is more effective if carried out earlier in the recovery period.
Visual hallucinations

Loss of vision can cause some people to experience visual hallucinations. Vision loss in stroke patients occurs most frequently with a visual field loss to one side (hemianopia).

Often hallucinations occur in the first few days after the vision loss. These hallucinations can last a few seconds or be nearly constant and can continue for up to a few months. They tend to disappear spontaneously.

Please don’t be concerned if you are aware of hallucinations this is a normal phenomenon with sudden vision loss.