Visual impairment:

Visual impairment is when a person has sight loss that cannot be fully corrected using glasses or contact lenses.

It's estimated that as many as two million people in the UK may be living with this sort of sight problem. Of these, around 365,000 are registered as blind or have sight impairment.

For anyone with visual impairment should visit an optometrist (optician) for an eye test at least every two years to be monitored.

Types of visual impairment

Visual impairment is usually classified as either 'sight impaired' or 'severely sight impaired'. These classifications are based on the results of the tests described below.

How is your vision measured by the use of the Snellen chart?

In the UK your visual acuity (VA) is often stated as a pair of numbers such as “6/6” or “6/15”. The first number is usually a 6 which simply means that the distance from you to the eye chart is 6 metres, (in the USA, the first number is usually 20, representing 20 feet this is the “20/20” vision everyone talks about).

If you have VA of “6/60”, this simply means you can read the top most letter when standing 6 metres away on the Snellen chart.

The larger the second number, the worse your vision is.

Sight impaired

Sight impairment, previously called ‘partial sight’, is usually defined as:

- having poor visual acuity (3/60 to 6/60) but having a full field of vision, or
- having a combination of slightly reduced visual acuity (up to 6/24) and a reduced field of vision or having blurriness or cloudiness in your central vision, or
- having relatively good visual acuity (up to 6/18) but a significantly reduced field of vision

Severely sight impaired

The legal definition of severe sight impairment (which was previously called ‘blindness’) is when ‘a person is so blind that they cannot do any work for which eyesight is essential’.

This usually falls into one of three categories:

- having very poor visual acuity (less than 3/60), but having a full field of vision
- having poor visual acuity (between 3/60 and 6/60) and a severe reduction in your field of vision
- having slightly reduced visual acuity (6/60 or better) and a significantly reduced field of vision

For more information contact: sensory.impairment@croydon.gov.uk
Common eye conditions.

Macular Degeneration

- Macular degeneration is the most common cause of sight loss in people over 65, although it can also affect young people.
- The macular is the most sensitive area of the retina and enables us to see detail and colour. It's this part of the eye that is used for such tasks as reading and writing, seeing faces and works best in good light.
- When the macular degenerates the central part of the vision is gradually lost and colour vision is reduced, although the side or peripheral vision is not affected. The central vision can become distorted, blurred and cause a difficulty in distinguishing tone and colour, shadows may appear and there are areas of missing vision centrally.

Points to consider:

- The provision of good levels of light in order to maximise vision and not exposed to glare.
- The person may have difficulty seeing signage.
  - Make sure signs are clear and easily visible.
- They may have problems judging speed and distance of oncoming traffic when crossing roads as well as mobility problems e.g. missing kerb edges, bollards.
  - If out on site with the person just be mindful and assist if required.
- The person may have difficulty in seeing in the office if drawers are left open.
  - Keep drawers shut at all times when not in use.
  - Keep walk ways clear.
- The use of colour and contrast follow link for changing colour to back ground documents.
  - http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/tan-background.doc
- Follow the below links for enlarging documents and icons.
  - http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-docs.doc
  - http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-icons-fonts.doc
Glaucoma

There are different types of Glaucoma. Chronic glaucoma is the most common and is caused by an increase of pressure on the inside of the eyes due to a build up of fluid. The process is gradual but can become permanent if not treated.

The first signs of chronic glaucoma are usually a blurring of the vision, or difficulty in focusing.

Points to consider:

- Central vision is often normal so reading and writing is not a difficulty.
- Symptoms may include bumping into furniture.
  - Keep walkways free from obstacles.
  - Keep drawers closed when not in use.
- Not seeing steps or obstacles, crossing the road or managing unfamiliar areas. These can be accentuated at night or in very bright conditions.
  - If out on site with the person just be mindful and assist if required.
- The use of colour and contrast follow link for changing colour to background documents. http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/tan-background.doc
Cataracts

- This is a cloudiness or opacity in the lens of the eye. It stops the eye form being able to focus and obscures the vision. A cataract can take anything from a few months to several years to develop. In some cases it can affect the whole field of vision (similar to driving through fog on full beam). Some people may have a small operation to help with the reduction in vision.

Points to consider:

- Things may seem blurred and unclear.
  - Follow the below links for enlarging documents and icons.
    - [http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-docs.doc](http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-docs.doc)
    - [http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-icons-fonts.doc](http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-icons-fonts.doc)
  - The use of colour and contrast are essential in order to maximise their vision as the person may not be able to see colours clearly.
    - The use of colour and contrast follow link for changing colour to back ground documents. [http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/tan-background.doc](http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/tan-background.doc)
- Very bright lights / glare will cause visual difficulties and discomfort.
  - Person may wish to have blinds down and lights off. If this can’t be done then management may consider the person wearing a peaked hat / darkened glasses.
- Steps and changes in surfaces should be highlighted clearly in order to minimise tripping and bumping into hazards.
  - If out on site with the person just be mindful and assist if required.
  - Keep walk ways free from obstacles.
  - Keep drawers closed when not in use.
Diabetic Retinopathy

- The retina is made up of light sensitive cells that are fed by a network of blood vessels. Diabetic Retinopathy causes the walls of the blood vessels to become fragile and begin to leak small amounts of blood.
- This can cause floating spots in front of the eyes or a blurring of vision
- Diabetic Retinopathy is the most common cause of sight loss in people under the age of 65 in the UK

Points to consider:

- Any part of the eye may be affected across the whole field of vision.
- The person may have several scotomas (blind spots).
- Sight will fluctuate day to day. The individual may find aspects of daily living difficult in reading and seeing documents.
  - Follow the below links for enlarging documents and icons.
    - [http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-docs.doc](http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-docs.doc)
    - [http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-icons-fonts.doc](http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/enlarging-icons-fonts.doc)
- The person may find difficulty in seeing documents with a white background due to brightness.
  - The use of colour and contrast follow link for changing colour to background documents. [http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/tan-background.doc](http://intranet.croydon.net/corpdept/healthsafety/workstation/tan-background.doc)
- People with diabetes often have other health problems which compound the visual difficulties they have.
Retinitis Pigmentose (RP)

This is the name given to a group of hereditary or genetic diseases that affects the retina. The retina slowly degenerates and loses its ability to transmit pictures to the brain.

The main symptom of this eye disease is the presence of dark deposits in the retina, which causes the symptom night blindness, narrowing of the peripheral vision leading to what is known as tunnel vision.

In some cases central vision is affected but the peripheral vision is retained.

Points to consider:

- The individual may be able to read, write and do other close work without any apparent difficulties. However mobility is often a problem seeing steps, doorways and obstacles due to the limited field of vision.
  - If out on site with the person just be mindful and assist if required.
  - Keep walk ways free from obstacles.
  - Keep drawers closed when not in use.
  - Don’t prop open doors without the individual knowing the door is being left open.
- The person may make themselves familiar with areas they work in and know how to feel themselves around.
  - If furniture is moved, make sure the person understands or you have agreed with the individual where the items are best placed.
- Night vision, bright sunlight and glare could be difficult to cope with, as this can further reduce vision.
  - The individual may prefer to wear a peaked hat or dark glasses to help.
  - Be mindful if out on site if the person requires some help. Remember to guide them around unforeseen obstacles.
- In some cases the individual can be affected by loss of hearing.
  - Be mindful when talking to the individuals.