

Visual Inattention Following Stroke

6. WHAT CAN BE DONE AT HOME TO HELP SOMEONE WITH VISUAL INATTENTION?

A number of things can be done to help people with visual inattention; the following are all designed to make the person more aware of their affected side and attend to it better:

- encourage visitors to sit on their affected side – hold their hand on the affected side to draw their attention to this side
- put interesting things more over to the affected rather than unaffected side
- put a line or tape down the left hand side of books or newspapers so the person knows where the line starts
- put colourful lights on the patients left side to draw their attention
- any games, puzzles etc including computerized games that will encourage the affected person to attend to there side.

7. CAN SOMEONE WITH VISUAL INATTENTION DRIVE?

No, it is not safe for some one with visual inattention to drive. People with visual inattention are not aware of anything on their affected side but often think their vision is normal. This makes it dangerous for them to drive. However each stroke is different and depending on how well the visual inattention and other stroke related problems recover some people are able to return to driving.

8. WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION ABOUT VISUAL INATTENTION?

If you would like to know more about visual inattention or have any questions or concerns, please contact:

British and Irish Orthoptic Society

62 Wilson Street, London, EC2A 2BU

Tel: 01353 665541

Website: www.orthoptics.org.uk

Email: bios@orthoptics.org.uk

Additional help and advice is available from:

The Stroke Association

Stroke House
240 City Road
London
EC1V 2PR

Tel: 020 7566 0300

Website: www.stroke.org.uk



1. WHAT IS VISUAL INATTENTION?

Visual inattention is a condition experienced by people who have had a stroke or head injury. It is when a person ignores every thing on one side of their visual world. It usually affects people who have had a right sided stroke and they ignore things on their left side. Right sided visual inattention is less common and tends to affect people in different ways.

This condition is also known as visual neglect or spatial inattention. People with visual inattention may also have a more general neglect where they ignore or do not attend to one half of their body, mainly the left side.

Visual inattention can vary from being very mild to very severe. As well as visual inattention some people may also have a hemianopia, loss of vision to the same side, which is being ignored. For more information on hemianopia see leaflet on 'Visual Field Loss Following Stroke or Head Injury'.

2. HOW CAN I TELL IF SOMEONE HAS VISUAL INATTENTION?

People who have visual inattention will be unaware of anything or anyone on their affected side. They may hear you but will not look at you or acknowledge you until you move around to their non-affected side.

They may only eat one half of the food on their plate, struggle to read because half of the page is missing, bump into people and objects on their affected side.

3. HOW WILL VISUAL INATTENTION AFFECT SOMEONE FOLLOWING A STROKE?

The majority of people, with visual inattention, tend to be symptom free. The brain is unaware that the affected side exists and the patient is unaware that anything is wrong, so they deny that they have a problem.

Visual inattention can affect a person in all aspects of their daily life e.g.

- ability to walk with out bumping into objects
- losing their sense of direction i.e. not taking the correct right or left turn when walking somewhere and getting lost
- crossing roads unsafely by not checking for oncoming traffic on the affected side
- all aspects of self-care such as dressing, washing, shaving; they may only dress, wash, shave the unaffected side etc.
- reading does not make sense because they only read the text on the unaffected side e.g. only read the right half of the page
- telling the time as they only see one side of the clock face.

People with visual inattention are dependent on others for help and ensuring they are safe.

This can cause problems with their rehabilitation and safety as well as a longer period of hospitalization.

4. CAN VISUAL INATTENTION BE CURED?

The mechanism for recovery of visual inattention is complex and still not fully understood. In many people there is frequently good recovery from visual inattention. However when it is present, continued input from health care professionals and carers is important to promote awareness of the affected side.

5. WHAT DOES THE TREATMENT FOR VISUAL INATTENTION INVOLVE?

Visual inattention is described as a disorder in 'looking' rather than 'seeing'. Orthoptic treatment involves getting the patient to look to their affected side. This is done using eye exercises and encouraging the patient to 'look' or scan for objects on their affected side.

Strategies to help with reading and other tasks are discussed and used. Occasionally prisms, eye patches, mirrors and games may also be used.