

# Caring for your eyes

.....  
Making the most of your sight  
.....

*Health &  
wellbeing*



***Age UK is the new force combining  
Age Concern and Help the Aged.***

***With almost 120 years of combined  
history to draw on, we are bringing  
together our talents, services  
and solutions to do more to enrich  
the lives of people in later life.***

***The Age UK family includes  
Age Cymru, Age NI and Age Scotland.***

This information guide has been prepared by Age UK and contains general advice only, which we hope will be useful. Nothing in this guide should be construed as specific advice and it should not be relied on as a basis for any decision or action. Age UK does not accept any liability arising from its use. We aim to ensure that this information is as up to date and accurate as possible, but please be warned that certain areas are subject to change from time to time. Please note that the inclusion of named agencies, companies, products, services or publications in this information guide does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement by Age UK.

Every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this guide is correct. However, things do change, so it is always a good idea to seek expert advice on your personal situation.

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Age UK is the new force combining

**AGE** and **HELP THE AGED** **WE WILL**  
*Concern*



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# Introduction

As we grow older, our sight tends to change and almost everyone over the age of 65 needs to wear glasses, whether for reading or to help with general vision. Age-related changes in the eye and specific sight conditions can lead to vision loss. But regular eye tests and suitable glasses will increase the chances of your sight remaining good.

Unfortunately, some people's sight will continue to get worse, to the point where they can have difficulty seeing even with glasses. But with the right help and advice, worsening sight shouldn't stop anyone from leading a full and independent life. This guide has suggestions on how to make the most of the vision you have, and provides advice on where to go for practical help.

Throughout this guide you will find suggestions for organisations that can give further information and advice about your options. Their contact details can be found in the 'Useful organisations' section (see pages 19–22). Contact details for local organisations can usually be found in your local phone book. If you have difficulty finding them, your local Age UK/Age Concern\* should be able to help.

As far as possible, the information given in this guide is applicable across the UK.

## Key

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This symbol indicates where information differs for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.



This symbol indicates who to contact for the next steps you need to take.

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\*Many of our local partners will remain Age Concern for a while yet.

## Regular sight tests

An eye test doesn't just check to see whether you need glasses – it's also a vital check on the health of your eyes. The test checks your vision straight ahead as well as your peripheral vision, which is important for noticing things that are approaching from your right and left.

The test also looks for age-related changes as well as eye conditions such as cataracts, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and glaucoma, which can lead to sight loss. These conditions can be detected at an early stage, usually before you have even noticed that anything is wrong. This is very important as early treatment may stop an eye disease getting worse and prevent the damage it would cause to your vision.

It's recommended that you have an eye test every two years if you are between the ages of 18 and 69. If you are aged 70 or over, you are advised to have an eye test every year. You should have a regular check, regardless of whether you live at home or in a care home, even if you think your sight is fine. If you notice any changes in your vision, it's vital to have your eyes checked as soon as possible.



If you're 60 or over, you can have a free NHS eye test (except in Scotland, where everyone is entitled to a free test, regardless of age). If you need an NHS home visit, this should be free as well. Some people under 60 are entitled to a free sight test.

You will qualify for a free eye test if you:

- receive the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or, in some cases, Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit (your partner and children will also be entitled to free tests)
- need complex or powerful lenses
- are registered blind or partially sighted
- have diabetes or glaucoma
- are aged 40 or over and have a close family member with glaucoma
- are a war pensioner, and need a sight test because of a disability for which you get a war pension.

### what next?

Contact NHS Direct (see page 21) for the number of your local PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Services) if you would like a list of local opticians who offer home visits.

In Wales, visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk) to search for

- ① opticians that do home visits. In Scotland, contact NHS Inform (see page 21). Visit the RNIB website (see page 22) to find out more about what happens in an eye test and about eye conditions.

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***An eye test doesn't just check to see whether you need glasses – it's also a vital check on the health of your eyes... If you notice any changes in your vision, it's vital to have your eyes checked as soon as possible.***

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## Choosing glasses


If your eye test indicates that you need glasses, the optician is legally obliged to give you a prescription. This shows the type and strength of lenses you need. You can take this prescription and use it to buy glasses from any supplier. Some frames and lenses are expensive, so be sure to shop around.

Wherever you buy your glasses, the optician should make sure that they fit and have the right lenses to correct or reduce your sight problems. It's vital to wear the right glasses and clean the lenses regularly. Wearing the wrong ones may mean you are more likely to get eye strain, misjudge curbs, or trip over obstacles.

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***The optician should make sure that your glasses fit and have the right lenses to correct or reduce your sight problems.***

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The optician will advise you on the most suitable lenses for your needs. There is a wide range of different lenses – bifocals, trifocals and varifocals – which can help you see in different situations. They save you from needing several different pairs of glasses but can make it harder for you to change focus and detect steps, which may make you more likely to fall. Talk to your optician to make sure the lenses are suitable for you.

In addition, lenses can come with various extras.

- Tinted lenses cut down on glare.
- Scratch-resistant lenses are less likely to get damaged.
- Reaction lenses darken when you go outside and lighten when you go indoors or into shade.

You may be tempted to buy ready-made reading glasses from a supermarket or pharmacy. However, these should only be used as a temporary, short-term solution as it is rare for both your eyes to need exactly the same amount of correction. They can sometimes cause eye strain and headaches, and are often less durable than prescription glasses.

If you think you would like to try contact lenses, ask your optician if they would be suitable for you.

If you're buying sunglasses, with or without prescription lenses, make sure they offer UV protection. This means that they protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet radiation, which can cause serious eye problems. Look for a UV400 label or the CE mark, which shows that they meet EU safety requirements.

## Help with costs

Some people are entitled to an NHS voucher to help pay for glasses or contact lenses. You are entitled to a voucher if you:

- receive the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit, Income Support, income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, income-related Employment and Support Allowance or, in some cases, Child Tax Credit or Working Tax Credit
- have an HC2 or HC3 certificate from the NHS Low Income Scheme. See our free factsheet *Help with health costs* for more information about applying for the scheme
- need complex or powerful lenses
- are a war pensioner, and need your glasses because of a disability for which you get a war pension.

The value of the voucher depends on the strength of your prescription and can be used at any opticians. If it doesn't cover the full cost of the glasses you want, you will need to make up the difference yourself. Vouchers don't cover special tinted or scratch-resistant coatings.

### what next?

For more information about help with health costs and the NHS Low Income Scheme, call Help with Health Costs (see page 21).

## *Driving and vision*

If you need glasses or contact lenses, the law requires you to wear them whenever you're driving. If you have a medical condition that could affect your ability to drive, you must contact the DVLA (see page 21) and fill in a medical questionnaire. Sight conditions that you must inform it about include cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration. The DVLA will try to make a decision about whether you can continue to drive from the information you provide. However, it may need information from your doctor, arrange for you to be examined by a medical officer, or ask you to take a driving assessment, eye test or driving test.


### **what next?**

Visit [www.direct.gov.uk/motoring](http://www.direct.gov.uk/motoring) to find out more and to download the medical questionnaire.

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***‘Since my eyesight deteriorated, Talking Books has been a lifeline for me. It has given me back my favourite hobby.’***

**When Paul’s eyesight deteriorated, he greatly missed reading books and newspapers.**

‘I was diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration (AMD) following a routine eye test. I’d noticed it was harder to read small print but just put it down to one of those things that happens as you get older. Now my sight has deteriorated to the point where I can only read very large print in high contrast.

‘I’ve always loved reading – I’d get through at least a book a week – so this was very upsetting. I found myself getting bored and frustrated without my “reading fix”.

‘My son rang the RNIB to see if they could help, and found out about their Talking Books service. I knew audio books existed but assumed they wouldn’t have anything I’d be interested in – how wrong I was! My son bought me a gift subscription which included the loan of a DAISY player to listen to books on, and I quickly got the hang of it. The RNIB has a huge library and I’ve found myself trying out new genres that I wouldn’t have gone for before. I’ve started enjoying poetry, much to my surprise! Talking Books has been a lifeline for me, and given me back my favourite hobby.’



# Lighting

Good lighting is very important to help you make the best use of your eyesight. Compared with the amount of light a healthy eye needs at 20 years of age, you usually need twice as much at 40 and three times as much at 60.

Natural daylight is an excellent source of light, but a surprising amount is lost through dirty windows and curtains. To increase daylight in your home, keep your windows clean and pull the curtains back as far as possible. Keep net curtains clean, or remove them altogether.

Vertical and horizontal blinds can be a good alternative to curtains. They allow you to control the amount of light coming into your home. You can use blinds to reduce glare and direct light at the angle most useful for you. Make sure you have adequate electric lighting too. Good lighting is particularly important at the top and bottom of stairs to help you see the steps clearly.

For reading or close work, use a direct light from a flexible table lamp, positioned in front of you and shining down on to your book or work. Fluorescent lamps are particularly efficient as they produce a lot of light but very little heat.

## what next?

Our free guide *Adapting your home* has more information about practical steps you can take to reduce the impact of sight loss on your independence. Contact Age UK to see if our HandyVan service is available in your area on 0845 026 1055. It can give advice on making your home safer, make small repairs and change light bulbs in difficult places.

## Practical aids for daily living

If you have serious sight loss, there are different optical aids that can help improve your vision. It's important that you get optical aids most suited to your particular eye condition and for a given activity. You will most likely need different types for activities such as reading a book, watching television or reading a bus number.

The simplest optical aids are special magnifiers. These make things look bigger so can help with tasks such as reading a newspaper. Magnifiers may be hand-held, have their own stand, or may be built into your glasses. Reading frames or 'typoscopes' are useful to reduce glare and concentrate vision on the area of print being read. You can make your own very easily by cutting out an oblong from a piece of black card.

For advice on optical aids, ask your doctor or eye specialist (ophthalmologist) to refer you to a low-vision clinic. These are usually based in hospitals. Specialist staff can suggest ways that you can make the best possible use of the sight you have and assess which optical aids would help you most. They can usually loan any equipment to you.

As well as optical aids, there are lots of gadgets and equipment that can help you lead an independent life. For example, a talking watch, or one with a large face, will make telling the time easier, and talking kitchen scales can help with cooking.

### what next?

Contact the Disabled Living Foundation to find out what practical aids are available (see page 20). Action for Blind People, the Partially Sighted Society and RNIB can also advise you on what is available (see pages 19 and 22).

## ***Accessible books, newspapers and games***

If your eyesight has deteriorated to the point where you're no longer able to enjoy reading books and newspapers, there are accessible alternatives.

Large-print books are available through local libraries. You can also get large-print games, such as playing cards, bingo sets, Monopoly and Scrabble. For more information, contact the RNIB helpline (see page 22).

RNIB provides a Talking Book Service that can supply a large range of books in audio format (see page 22). Another organisation, Calibre Audio Library, runs a free library service for anyone who has difficulty reading printed books. It has an extensive range of books on cassette tapes, MP3 disks and USB memory sticks. See page 20 for contact details.

Newspapers and magazines are available on cassette tape through most local libraries. The Talking Newspapers Association (TNAUK) can also supply them on cassette tape, CD, DAISY CD and by MP3 download. See page 22 for contact details.

British Wireless for the Blind Fund can supply radios and audio equipment to people who are registered as sight-impaired or seriously sight-impaired, and in financial need. The contact details are on page 20.

### **what next?**

**All of Age UK's information guides and factsheets are available in accessible formats. If you'd like a copy of any of them in large print or on audio, call Age UK Advice (see page 19).**

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*Large-print books are available through local libraries. You can also get large-print games, such as playing cards, bingo sets, Monopoly and Scrabble.*

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## Registering as sight-impaired

If you have serious sight loss, you can register with your local council as sight-impaired or seriously sight-impaired. This used to be known as registering as partially sighted or blind. Being registered as seriously sight-impaired doesn't necessarily mean you can't see at all – most people who are registered do still have some useful vision.

Of course you don't have to register, but it has some advantages. You will be entitled to concessions, such as a Disabled Person's Railcard or a reduction in the price of your TV licence if you are registered as seriously sight-impaired. And your claim for disability benefits may be strengthened if you are registered as sight-impaired or seriously sight-impaired. The RNIB Welfare Rights Service can advise you on this. To contact it, call the RNIB helpline (see page 22).

To register, ask your doctor to refer you to an eye specialist (ophthalmologist). They will examine your eyes to see whether you are eligible. If you are, they will complete and sign a special form. With your permission, a copy will be sent to social services. Someone should then visit you to talk about being included on the register and what needs you may have.

If you think you need help with day-to-day tasks or that you might be at risk of an accident, you can ask your local social services department for a care assessment, even if you are not registered (in Scotland contact your social work department and in Northern Ireland contact your local health and social care trust). Your optician can give you a Low Vision Leaflet (LVL) if they think you would benefit from help from social services. You can then fill in the leaflet and send it in.



Read our guide *Care at home* to find out more about getting a care assessment. For more information on registering, download or order the RNIB's free guide *The benefits of registering as blind or partially sighted* (see page 22).

## What help could you get?

If you have a sight problem that is affecting your day-to-day activities, there are various different types of help that you might get from your local social services department. This includes specialist assessments, information, advice and support.

A social worker may offer practical help at home or put you in touch with useful specialist organisations.

A rehabilitation worker can give you practical advice on how to make life easier. This can include how to use lighting effectively, how to adapt your kitchen and other rooms so that it's easier to manage your daily routine, and how to use colour, contrast and texture to make the most of your remaining vision.

You may also qualify for disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance, even if you aren't registered as sight-impaired or seriously sight-impaired. If you're living on a low income, you may also be entitled to benefits such as Pension Credit or Housing Benefit. See our free guides *More money in your pocket: a guide to claiming benefits for people over pension age* or *Claiming benefits: a guide for people of working age* to find out more or drop into your local Age UK/Age Concern\* for a free benefits check.

\*Many of our local partners will remain Age Concern for a while yet.

## ***If you're not happy with the service you receive from your optician***

Occasionally, you may be unhappy with the service you receive from your optician and want to make a complaint.

Always start by raising your concerns with the optician. If you're not happy with their response, make a complaint in writing to the optician directly. Every registered practice should have a responsible person and procedure for dealing with any complaints they receive.

If this doesn't resolve your complaint, you can contact the Optical Consumer Complaints Service (see page 21). It offers a mediation service to try to find a fair solution for you and the optician. If you're still not satisfied, it can arrange for your complaint to be examined by an independent adviser.

# Useful organisations

## Age UK

Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We provide advice and information for people in later life through our Age UK Advice line, publications and online.

Age UK Advice: 0800 169 65 65  
[www.ageuk.org.uk](http://www.ageuk.org.uk)

Call Age UK Advice to find out whether there is a local Age UK/Age Concern near you, and to order free copies of our information guides and factsheets.

In Wales, contact  
**Age Cymru:** 0800 169 65 65  
[www.agecymru.org.uk](http://www.agecymru.org.uk)

In Northern Ireland, contact  
**Age NI:** 0808 808 7575  
[www.ageni.org](http://www.ageni.org)

In Scotland, contact  
**Age Scotland:** 0845 125 9732  
[www.agescotland.org.uk](http://www.agescotland.org.uk)

## Action for Blind People

Runs a free national information and advice service on many issues associated with visual impairment. It can offer support for people newly diagnosed with sight loss and also gives grants, organises holidays and runs housing schemes for visually impaired people. Contact it through the RNIB helpline.

14–16 Verney Road  
London SE16 3DZ

Helpline: 0303 123 9999  
[www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk](http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk)

### **British Wireless for the Blind Fund**

Supplies radios and audio equipment to people who are registered as sight-impaired or seriously sight-impaired, and in financial need.

10 Albion Place  
Maidstone  
Kent ME14 5DZ

Tel: 01622 754 757  
[www.blind.org.uk](http://www.blind.org.uk)

### **Calibre Audio Library**

Runs a free library service, offering books on cassette tape, MP3 disk and USB memory stick.

Calibre Audio Library  
Aylesbury HP22 5XQ

Tel: 01296 432 339  
[www.calibre.org.uk](http://www.calibre.org.uk)

### **Disabled Living Foundation**

Provides free, impartial advice about types of products suitable for older and disabled people.

380–384 Harrow Road  
London W9 2HU

Helpline: 0845 130 9177  
Email: [helpline@dlf.org.uk](mailto:helpline@dlf.org.uk)  
[www.dlf.org.uk](http://www.dlf.org.uk)

## **DVLA – Drivers, Medical Enquiries**

Swansea SA99 1TU

Tel: 0300 790 6806

Email: [eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:eftd@dvla.gsi.gov.uk)

## **Help with Health Costs**

Tel: 0845 850 1166

[www.nhs.uk/healthcosts](http://www.nhs.uk/healthcosts)

## **NHS Direct**

Gives information about local health services in your area and provides health advice in England.

Tel: 0845 4647

[www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

In Wales, visit [www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk)

## **NHS Inform**

Health information and advice for people in Scotland.

Tel: 0800 22 44 88

[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)

## **Optical Consumer Complaints Service**

Independent mediation service that can help with complaints about opticians.

OCCS

PO Box 219, Petersfield GU32 9BY

Tel: 0844 800 5071

Email: [postbox@opticalcomplaints.co.uk](mailto:postbox@opticalcomplaints.co.uk)

[www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk](http://www.opticalcomplaints.co.uk)

### **Partially Sighted Society**

Provides information, advice and details of useful organisations to people with a visual impairment. It has a drop-in centre in Doncaster.

7/9 Bennetthorpe  
Doncaster DN2 6AA

Tel: 0844 477 4966  
[www.partsight.org.uk](http://www.partsight.org.uk)

### **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

Provides a range of services, advice and information for people with serious sight loss, including a wide range of leaflets and publications, many of which are available in large print, Braille, Moon and languages other than English. RNIB can also give you details of local organisations that can provide you with local help and support.

105 Judd Street  
London WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999  
[www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

### **Talking Newspapers Association (TNAUK)**

Supplies newspapers and magazine on cassette tape, CD, DAISY CD and by MP3 download.

National Recording Centre  
Heathfield  
East Sussex TN21 8DB

Tel: 01435 866 102  
[www.tnauk.org.uk](http://www.tnauk.org.uk)

# Can you help Age UK?

Please complete the donation form below with a gift of whatever you can afford and return to: Age UK, FREEPOST LON13041, PO Box 203, London N1 9BR. Alternatively, you can phone 0800 169 80 80 or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/donate](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/donate). If you prefer, you can donate directly to one of our national or local partners. Thank you.

## Personal details

Title:	Initials:	Surname:
Address:		
Postcode:		
Tel:	Email:	

By providing your email address and/or mobile number you are agreeing to us contacting you in these ways. You may contact us at any time to unsubscribe from our communications.

## Your gift

I would like to make a gift of: £

I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to Age UK

## Card payment

I wish to pay by (please tick)  MasterCard  Visa  CAF CharityCard  
 Maestro  American Express

(Maestro only)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Signature X
Expiry date	<input type="text"/>	/	<input type="text"/>	Issue no. (Maestro only)	<input type="text"/>	

## Gift Aid declaration

(please tick) Yes, I want Age UK and its partner organisations\* to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise, as gift aid donations. I confirm I pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity will reclaim on my donations in the tax year. Date: \_\_\_/\_\_\_/\_\_\_ (please complete). \*Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI



We will use the information you have supplied to communicate with you in line with Data Protection guidelines. Age UK (registered charity no 1128267) comprises the Charity, its group of companies and national partners (Age Cymru, Age Scotland and Age NI). If you would prefer not to hear from them or carefully selected third parties, let us know by phoning 0800 107 8977.



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*As we grow older, our sight tends to change. But regular eye tests and suitable glasses will increase the chances of your sight remaining good.*

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# What should I do now?

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For more information on the issues covered in this guide, or to order any of our publications, please call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65** or visit [www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/healthandwellbeing)

Our publications are also available in large print and audio formats.

The following Age UK information guides may be useful:

- *Health services*
- *Staying steady*
- *Healthy living*

The Age UK Group offers a wide range of products and services specially designed for people in later life. For more information, please call **0800 169 18 19**.

If contact details for your local Age UK/Age Concern\* are not in the box below, call Age UK Advice free on **0800 169 65 65**.



\*Many of our local partners will remain Age Concern for a while yet.

Age UK is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (registered charity number 1128267 and registered company number 6825798). The registered address is 207-221 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ. Age Concern England (registered charity number 261794) and Help the Aged (registered charity number 272786), and their trading and other associated companies merged on 1 April 2009. Together they have formed the Age UK Group, dedicated to improving the lives of people in later life. The three national Age Concerns in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have also merged with Help the Aged in these nations to form three registered charities: Age Scotland, Age NI and Age Cymru. ID10226 03/11