

Nystagmus

What is nystagmus?

- It is an involuntary, repetitive eye movements (wobbly eyes)
- Most often the eye movements are from side to side but they can be vertical or circular in motion
- Nystagmus often causes people to adopt a noticeable head posture
- It is the most commonly seen type of vision impairment in school age children
- Nystagmus can be a standalone condition or can be associated with other eye conditions e.g. albinism
- There are no effective treatments or cures for nystagmus
- People with nystagmus may wear glasses for another reason. Glasses do not correct nystagmus.

What are the effects of nystagmus?

Nystagmus affects different people in different ways. They usually have some degree of blurred vision but DO NOT see the world moving. The degree and direction of eye movement, amount of visual loss varies greatly from person to person. Some people with nystagmus have a level of vision that falls within normal limits while for others it has a more significant impact on their level of vision. Nystagmus may cause:

- reduced vision (distance and near) and problems with crowding
- difficulty changing focus from distance to near
- problems maintaining eye contact, which can impact on social interaction

- the person to adopt an unusual head or eye position which reduces the nystagmus and enables them to see better. Some may nod or move their head
- variable levels of vision which become worse they are tired, ill or stressed
- bright lights can cause discomfort (photophobia)
- difficulty judging depths, distances and changes in surfaces.

What can help?

Some or all of these may be appropriate strategies:

- Wear glasses, if prescribed and keep them clean
- Use whatever head position gives the best level of vision
- Sitting to one side of a screen, blackboard, etc. does not help because it reduces the angle at which the screen is seen from. A better solution is to sit directly in front and adopt the preferred head turn
- Students should never ask a student to share books or worksheets as this might mean that item would possibly be too far away to see but also at the wrong angle
- Worksheets and photocopies should be clear with good contrast between print and paper
- Write using a 2B pencil, a black felt tip pen or black biro to provide best contrast
- Use good quality black or dark blue markers on whiteboards. Avoid using green. Red or other light colours as many in a class will have difficulty seeing these
- Many students with nystagmus can read very small print if it is close enough or with use of a visual aid. For some, the option of large print material helps and should be available for them. Most importantly, all written/ printed material should be clear and provide good contrast.
- Check with the specialist teacher (QTVI) about the most appropriate size of font for the pupil. Avoid books with poorly produced print illustrations
- Due to focussing difficulties, some students will benefit from having access to desk copies of information that they need to copy from a board

- Some students may benefit from extra time to take in visual information and to complete tasks successfully
- A Qualified Teacher of the Vision Impaired (QTVI) from the EA Sensory Service will assess the child's functional vision within the school environment and provide advice to the school on specific strategies for curriculum access and independent learning.

Additional information

Nystagmus at School is an informative video for teachers and support staff to watch. It is available on the [Nystagmus Family Foundation Facebook page](#) or on YouTube.

Living with Nystagmus in Childhood – Molly's Story is an interesting and informative video on the [RNIB's Nystagmus web page](#)

Nystagmus The way We See It features BBC TV presenter Richard Osman, student Will Coidan, Harriet and her mum Rosie talking about how nystagmus affects them. The video covers school, university, employment, driving, sport and being the parent of a child with nystagmus. The video is available on [this RNIB web page](#) or on YouTube.

[Nystagmus a video by Henshaws](#) is short and informative and has useful information for school and parents.

[Can I Tell You about Nystagmus](#) is a video about a book, about nystagmus found on Nadine Neckles website.

Useful contacts

EA Sensory Service

Tel: 028 2566 1258

Email: sensoryservice@eani.org.uk

[EA Sensory Service Website](#)

[Gene Vision: this website has information about childhood nystagmus](#)

[This is a link to Nystagmus Network website](#)