

Department of Optometry, Oxford Eye Hospital

# Low Vision Services for Adults in Oxfordshire

Information for patients



# What is Low Vision?

A person is described as having low vision when their ability to see is reduced even when using both eyes and wearing their correct glasses. It can cause difficulties when performing everyday tasks, such as reading.

There are a number of eye conditions that can result in low vision. Whilst treatment is available for some eye conditions, it is not always possible to restore perfect vision. It is important in the first instance that you are first seen by an Ophthalmologist (eye doctor) to make a diagnosis (find the reason why your vision is reduced). Your community Optometrist or GP can make the referral to the Ophthalmology service for you.

There are a vast number of services available in Oxfordshire for people with low vision. This leaflet outlines some of these services.

## Ophthalmology

If you have poor central vision or poor edge vision you will usually have already been seen by an Ophthalmologist for advice about your condition. However, if you have any new questions, particularly about new therapies or changes to your existing condition, your community Optometrist or GP can refer you back to the Ophthalmologist.

# Visual aids clinic or 'Low vision clinic'

The Optometry department at the Oxford Eye Hospital runs a visual aids clinic for people with low vision. You can ask to be seen in Oxford, Banbury, Witney or Wantage for a visual aids assessment.

After discussing your needs and requirements, the Optometrist will conduct an eye examination to make sure that your glasses are still giving you the best vision you can get.

There are a range of devices available to help you make the most of your vision. Magnifiers, or optical aids, are one type of device available. There are different strengths and types of magnifier available, depending on your vision and the task you would like to do. The hospital Optometrist will assess your vision and work with you to find the most appropriate magnifier to optimise your vision. They will also show you a variety of non-optical and electronic aids.

The magnifiers are available on a free loan basis from the hospital eye service. They can be exchanged at subsequent visits if your vision or vision needs change.

Your hospital Optometrist will give you additional information on optimising your vision and/or refer you to other relevant services.

To access the visual aids service you need your GP, your Ophthalmologist (if you are under the hospital eye service) or your community Optometrist to refer you. You do not need to be registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired to use this service.

# Eye Clinic Liaison Officer (ECLO)

The ECLO is based at the Eye Hospital in Oxford. They will be available when you receive your diagnosis to give you emotional support and further information about the services available to you in Oxfordshire.

Referrals to see the ECLO are made by the Ophthalmologist or Optometrist in the hospital. If you would like to see the ECLO please ask at your next appointment.

## Genetic Counselling

Sometimes, but not always, conditions that cause low vision are hereditary (run in families) and/or are caused by a genetic fault (problem with the instructions that build our bodies). Having a genetic condition in the family can raise questions and have implications, not only for you, but for others in your family.

At the Oxford Eye Hospital a specialist ophthalmic genetics clinic is available. This is supported by an Ophthalmic Genetic Counsellor (nurse or other professional with expertise in genetics). These clinics are aimed at answering your 'genetic-related' questions.

### **How might genetic counselling help me?**

The doctors and Ophthalmic Genetic Counsellor can help you in several ways:

- Making or confirming a diagnosis.
- Providing information about the eye condition.
- Discussing the risk, if any, that you may be affected by the condition in the future.

- Discussing the risk, if any, that your children may inherit the condition.
- Explaining what genetic tests might be available.
- Talking about the support available to you and ways of coping with the condition.

If you have any concerns or questions about the genetics of your condition please discuss these with your Ophthalmologist or GP. If appropriate, they can make a referral to the ophthalmic genetics clinic.

## County Council Services

### **Rehabilitation services**

Rehabilitation services are provided by Social and Community Services, Oxfordshire County Council. They assess people of all ages who have sight loss and cover three key areas:

- **Independent living skills** (personal care, cooking, organising and lighting).
- **Communications** (existing communications skills, teaching you new skills to help you manage your low vision, such as learning to use 'off centre vision' (eccentric viewing) if appropriate, using a PC, Braille, local and national talking book services and electronic visual aids).
- **Mobility** (current levels of mobility (moving around), use of different cane types, such as symbol canes, guide canes, and long canes with appropriate training programmes).

They also offer advice on benefits and services available to visually impaired people. They can arrange to see you at home, within your workplace, or at their offices in Abingdon.

You can be referred to the rehabilitation service by either a letter from your GP; a "Letter of Visual Impairment" (LVI) from your high street Optometrist; or a Referral of Visual Impairment (RVI) or Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) from the hospital. Alternatively you can contact them directly using the details below:

### **The Visual Impairment Team (OCC)**

Social and Community Services

Oxfordshire County Council

Abbey House

Abbey Close

ABINGDON

OX14 3JD

Telephone: 01865 894 935

Email: [visual.impairment@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:visual.impairment@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

### **Library services**

The library service is able to offer visually impaired people a number of reading options such as large print books and books on CD and tape.

The Dolphin 'Supernova' package is on all public library computers. This is a computer program which can magnify the screen, read out the text on the page and translate Braille, making it easier to access the internet or type a piece of work.

# Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (OAB)

Oxfordshire Association for the Blind is a charity organisation that has an open door policy – everyone is welcome. However, to make the most of your visit it is suggested that you phone in advance.

OAB provide a range of services including:

- Information, advice and equipment (including daily living aids and electronic reading aids) from their sight advisory centre, Abingdon Road, Oxford.
- Information and advice from their sight advisory desk at Oxford Eye Hospital.
- Counselling services specifically relating to visual impairment.
- A quarterly newsletter available in large print, online in PDF or Word document format (compatible with audio readers), as an online audio version or as an audio cassette or MP3 stick.
- Support from an experienced welfare officer and home visiting service for residents of Oxford City.
- Transcription services.
- IT training, including magnifier and audio reader packages.
- Agents for British Wireless Fund for the Blind.

Their contact details are:

Oxfordshire Association for the Blind  
Bradbury Lodge  
Gordon Woodward Way  
Abingdon Road  
Oxford OX1 4XL

Tel: 01865 725 595

Website: [www.oxeyes.org.uk](http://www.oxeyes.org.uk)

# Support groups

## **Oxfordshire Association for the Blind (OAB)**

Website: [www.oxeyes.org.uk/website/helping-you/local-support-groups/](http://www.oxeyes.org.uk/website/helping-you/local-support-groups/)

## **Macular Disease Support Groups**

Macular degeneration causes loss of central vision and is the leading cause of registered vision impairment. Contact the Macular Society for further advice and information about local self-help groups in Oxfordshire.

Helpline: 0300 3030 111

Email: [info@macularsociety.org](mailto:info@macularsociety.org)

Website: [www.macularsociety.org/How-we-help/Local-support-groups](http://www.macularsociety.org/How-we-help/Local-support-groups)

If you have a specific requirement, need an interpreter, a document in Easy Read, another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221 473** or email **[PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk)**

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