



Eye Health

What is the scale of the problem?

Almost two million people in the UK are living with sight loss. That is approximately one person in thirty. It is estimated that due to the ageing population this number will increase by 22% by 2020 and double by 2050. Sight loss can affect people of all ages at any time, but certain groups of the population are at greater risk:

- People over the age of over 65
- Smokers
- People from black and minority ethnic communities
- Those with a family history of eye disease
- People with diabetes mellitus
- People less likely to access primary care eye services such as groups from lower low socioeconomic status.

In addition people living with learning disabilities are more likely to have either refractive error or to be blind or partially sighted than the general population.

[RNIB 2016, Key Information and Statistics](#)

What can we do?

1. **Regular eye examinations:** Everyone should have their eyes examined at least once every two years, even if there is no change in vision. Certain sight-threatening conditions such as glaucoma have no symptoms and others present very rapidly and can cause damage before a difference is noticed. A large percentage of sight loss is preventable if detected early enough. Almost two thirds of sight loss in older people is caused by refractive error and cataract and in most cases, the person's sight could be improved by prescribing correct glasses or cataract surgery. *[RNIB 2016, Key Information and Statistics](#)*

NHS funded Sight Tests in Wales are free for many people including those under 16 (19 in full time education), over 60 and on certain means tested benefits. People living in Wales can also receive an annual extended eye examination (EHEW) funded by the state if they.

- have an eye problem that needs urgent attention
- have sight in one eye only
- have a hearing impairment and are profoundly deaf
- suffer from retinitis pigmentosa
- are of Black or Asian ethnicity
- are referred by their GP to an Optometrist.

More information on NHS Sight Tests and Eye Health Examination Wales (EHEW) is available at **Welsh Eye Care Service** <http://www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk/public-and-patients>

2. **Reduce health harming behaviours:** Smoking can double the risk of developing age-related macular degeneration which is the UK's leading cause of sight loss. Smokers tend to develop AMD earlier than non-smokers and smoking is also linked to the development of cataract. People can access free help and advice by contacting Help Me Quit www.helpmequit.wales or by calling: **0800 085 2219** or Texting: HMQ to **80818**

RNIB 2016, Key Information and Statistics

3. **Protect your eyes from the sun:** Both UVA and UVB can damage the eye and may increase the risk of cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. The World Health Organisation estimates that up to 20 per cent of cataracts may be caused by over exposure to UV radiation and are therefore avoidable. Wearing sunglasses that have a CE mark or carry British Standard BSEN 1836:1997 or contact lenses with a built in UV filter will protect the eyes.
4. **Safety first:** DIY causes thousands of eye related injuries each year. Always wear safety goggles to protect the eyes from flying debris and fine particles. Sport, especially racquet-based sports, also causes many eye injuries each year - invest in a pair of protective sports goggles which can be glazed to your spectacle prescription if required.
5. **Check your family history:** Glaucoma, cataract and age related macular degeneration can have a familial link. People over 40 with a direct relative suffering from glaucoma are entitled to a state funded NHS Sight Test annually. For more information visit Welsh **Eye Care Service** <http://www.eyecare.wales.nhs.uk/public-and-patients>