



Dyslexia and visual issues

This leaflet explains the difference between dyslexia and visual issues, how they can overlap, and what support is available to make reading more comfortable.

It's important to understand that visual stress and dyslexia are different things, but some people have both. Visual and visual perceptual issues can affect our reading and writing, which is why it is sometimes confused with dyslexia. Visual issues don't cause dyslexia but can affect how you see text and make reading difficult and uncomfortable, affecting how you learn to read.

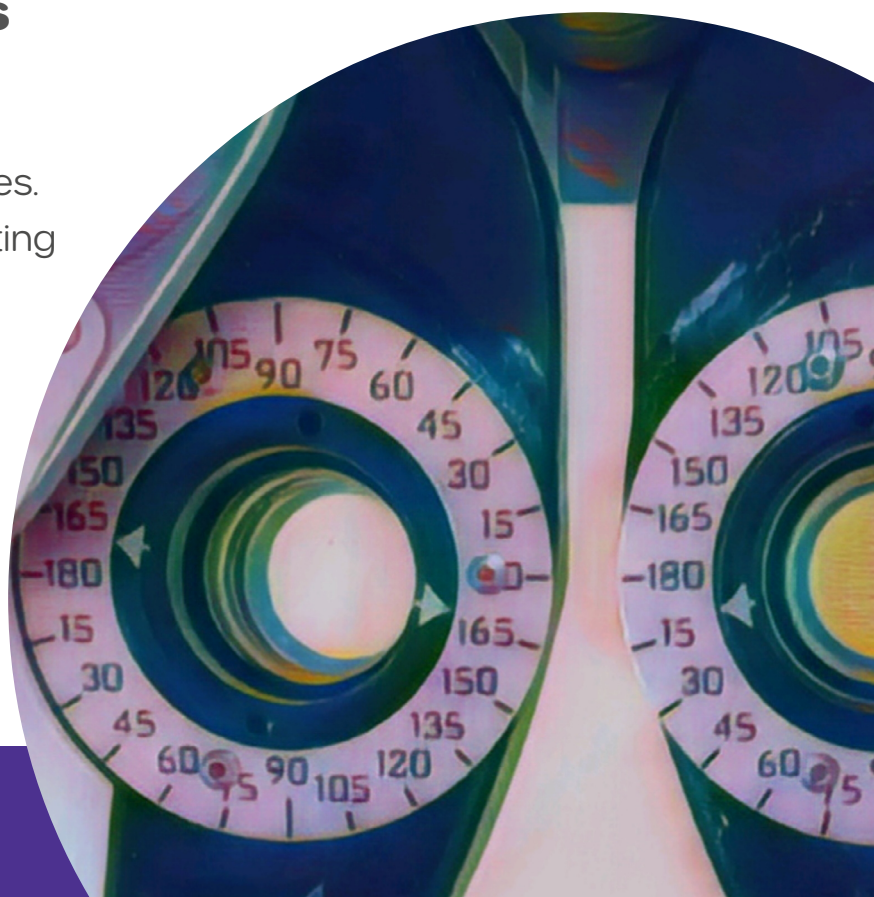
Some of these difficulties might not be detected in a routine eye test and can occur in children or adults with perfect vision. Not everyone with dyslexia will experience these visual problems, although they do have more impact on dyslexic readers and are more common. People who are not dyslexic can also have these difficulties and struggle to read as a result.

All of these conditions can be treated by an eye care professional.

Types of visual problems

Binocular Instability

Binocular vision co-ordinates the eyes. When both eyes work together, rotating and focusing, this results in a clear single image. When this does not work properly there can be blurring, headaches and visual discomfort after short periods of reading.



Eye Movement Control

in reading, the eyes make short rapid movements interspersed with short fixations. When these movements are poorly controlled, it is common to miss words, lose your place in a passage or struggle to track along a line of text.

Visual stress

Previously known as Meares Irlen Syndrome , this is a sensitivity to light, pattern and flicker which can result in distortions of the text and the illusion of the print moving or blurring. The symptoms of visual stress are more commonly noted in people who struggle to read, for example they are less efficient at skim reading or spend longer looking at individual components of written words. Lighting can exacerbate visual stress, for example fluorescent lighting can make it worse.

Visual perception

The ability to recognise similarities and differences, see subtle changes in text (like horse and house) and remember what you see (visual memory) require good visual perceptual processing. Poor visual perception can account for some of the common errors young readers have, as well as adults.

Visual problems may explain some of the following symptoms when reading:

- Text looks blurry even with your glasses on
- Letters appear to move or jump about, or appear double
- Text looks distorted, for example lines might look bent or letters might merge
- Difficulty with patterns or colours in text
- Difficulties following a line of text or column of numbers
- Sore eyes/eye strain and early fatigue doing close work
- Tiredness when reading and not being able to comprehend what is being read
- Headaches/migraines

Who can help?

An assessment by a qualified optometrist/orthoptist can help. It is very important to have vision assessed by someone who can look at a range of visual conditions as many of the symptoms or difficulties can be caused by more than one condition. It is also common for more than one visual or visual perceptual condition to be present. There are a number of different treatments that may be required depending on the cause. Not all eye care professionals assess for visual stress and visual perceptual difficulties but they will know who does and can suggest an expert in your area.

Other things that can help:

- Having a conversation with someone about what they see when they look at text.
- Follow our dyslexia-friendly typed formats guidance.
- Tinting the background on your mobile, tablet or computer using the background function in your device settings.
- Using coloured rulers/overlays.
- Using tinted paper to write or print on, rather than using white paper.
- Clear typefaces, such as Century Gothic, Comic Sans or Verdana, minimum size 12pt – people will find what typeface suits them best.