

March 20, 2009

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## Vision issues following stroke

Does this sound familiar?

- Difficulty seeing surroundings on one side
- Bumping into things on one side
- Feeling like the vision from one eye has been affected
- Difficulty locating objects which seem obvious to others
- Ignoring food on one side of the plate or shaving one side of the face
- Seeing double or things that are hazy or blurred
- Difficulty moving about or coping with crowds and busy environments
- Changes in ability to read
- Increased sensitivity to light or glare
- Getting lost in familiar environments
- Occasionally experiencing changes in the way things look.

The issues listed are commonly reported after a person sustains an acquired brain injury. They may not actually be noticed by the individual, but may be evident to family or friends.

People suffering from vision loss due to a brain injury, usually the result of a head injury or stroke, will find practical help and advice from Guide Dogs SA.NT's Acquired Brain Injury Vision Services team of specialist mobility instructors and occupational therapists.

One of the conditions the team assists clients with is homonymous hemianopia, partial blindness resulting in a loss of vision in the same visual field of both eyes.

Usually people think that they have lost sight in one eye, but it is actually the loss of half of their vision in each eye.

This is because the brain has lost the ability to process what the eyes are seeing or the messages are not reaching the part of the brain that interprets vision.

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Another condition often associated with having a stroke is visual inattention. This is where the brain finds it difficult to pay attention to vision on the affected side of the body. This is due to visual overload.

People who experience this may find themselves bumping into doorways, neglecting food on one side of their plate, find it difficult to begin reading at the beginning of a line or generally find it difficult to locate objects placed on their affected side. Both hemianopia and visual inattention can affect one half of what a person sees and may occur together.

Acquired Brain Injury Vision Services designs programs to address current vision, mobility needs and the general impact of the acquired brain injury.

Scanning techniques are used to help people compensate for any vision loss with the aim of regaining safe and independent mobility.

Training may range from orientation and mobility in residential homes to safe outdoor pedestrian skills, including road-crossing strategies, to more complex challenging environments such as busy shopping areas. Independent public transport travel may also be a part of the individual program.

An exciting new development is the use of Global Positioning System (GPS) devices that have been adapted for people with impaired vision.

Occupational therapists also provide programs that are individually tailored to assist people to become more independent in their everyday tasks, such as cooking, cleaning or money handling.

Other impacts that a stroke can have on vision include double vision and difficulty with eye movements. An orthoptist is available to review these issues and provide strategies.

There is no need for a doctor's referral to access services. All you need to do is call Guide Dogs SA.NT on 8203 8333 to self refer. Referrals are also welcome from health professionals and family members. All services are free to clients.