

# Your Vision After Stroke

## Visual Acuity Changes

### Introduction

Visual acuity means how clearly you can see things. After a stroke, your vision might be blurred and it can be harder to read, see faces, or notice small details. Your eye condition may be temporary, or it may be long term and managed by using the right approaches and seeing the right healthcare provider.

In this handout and with your health care team, you will learn about your eye condition and get strategies and advice for managing visual acuity changes.

It is important to see an eye doctor within 1 month after your stroke to examine your eyes. To see an optometrist, you can book an appointment yourself or be referred. If you do not have an ophthalmologist (a medical eye doctor), your doctor can refer you.

### Vision problems or impairment

You might not see as clearly as you did before your stroke. You may experience blurred vision or loss of vision. Not everyone who has a stroke will have vision problems as it depends on which part of the brain is affected. Vision problems or impairments can be mild, moderate, or severe. Seeing clearly after your stroke is important for your recovery.



Blurred vision



Clear vision

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in collaboration with the Provincial EyeSee After Stroke Working Group

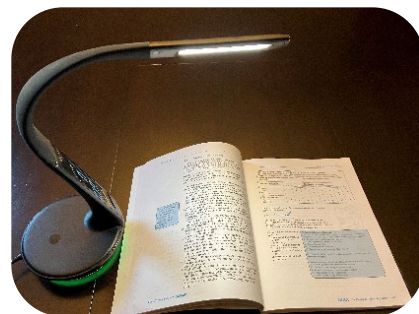
## Practical ways to enhance vision

There are many ways to enhance the vision you do have. These include the use of lighting, making adjustments in your home, using magnification and assistive technology, and following recommendations for leisure activities. Your rehabilitation professional can provide specific recommendations for you.

### Lighting

You may find you prefer a certain type of lighting. It is important to try out many kinds to see which one works best for you.

- A flexible arm lamp may help you with close-up work. Shine the light directly on the task that you are doing, like reading a book or newspaper. It is best to put the light on the side you see the best.
- Your vision after moving from a bright room to a dark room, or from a dark room to a bright room, can be affected from your stroke. Keeping the same lighting throughout your home can make it easier for you to see.
- You can add extra lights under your cupboards to shine light exactly where you need it.
- When using natural daylight, make sure it does not cause glare or shadows. Too much lighting can cause glare, which can make it harder to see. If you have glare, try using glasses with a tint, like light yellow or purple. Some tinted glasses can be used for indoor or outdoor use and come in various shades. Sun visors or hats may help reduce glare outside by blocking light from above.



### Adjustments for your home

- Change the colour of your door handles so they stand out against the door.
- Use a different coloured strip of electrical tape around light switches to help you find them.
- Write notes with a big black marker to be easier to see. Use black lined paper.
- Use a phone with big, numbered buttons to make it easier to see.
- Sometimes using different textures can help you. Raised stickers can be used for appliances such as your washing machine, stove top or microwave.



- Use contrasting colours around the home to make things stand out. For example:
  - Pick light-coloured cups for dark drinks or dark cups for light- coloured drinks.
  - Choose different coloured knives or chopping boards.
  - Use different coloured placemats, plates, or tablecloths.



Using a red placemat makes the white cup stand out

- You may find it easier to read print on a yellow background. You can buy yellow overlays from online stores like the CNIB Smart Life Store ([cnibsmartlife.ca](http://cnibsmartlife.ca)) or stationery stores.

**Yellow overlays can improve contrast!**

## Magnification aids and assistive technology

There are many types of magnifiers available. Magnifiers come in different sizes, and some are easier to carry around than others. For example, an LED handheld magnifier makes things brighter and easier to see. The magnifiers that are available from vision rehabilitation specialists or from optometrists are usually much stronger than storebought ones.



LED magnifier



Electronic magnifier

Having an assessment done at Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (self-referral) or at specialized low vision clinics at certain hospitals or optometrist offices can be helpful. Depending on your level of vision loss there may be government assistance for visual aids. You can also purchase visual aids from the CNIB SmartLife store in person or online ([cnibsmartlife.ca](http://cnibsmartlife.ca)).



Computers, tablets and smartphones can be especially useful if you have reduced vision.

You may have to adjust the settings on your phone or computer tablet, for example by:

- Adjusting the font (text size)
- Changing the contrast
- Using text-to-speech features that can read text aloud to you.

You can use your smartphone to help you with your daily activities. It can give directions, place phone calls, answer questions, and offer other types of help.

Apps such as “Seeing AI” (for Apple devices), “Envision” (for Android devices) or “Be My Eyes” can help by reading or describing things back to you.

Smart digital assistants, like Siri, Alexa, or Google, can help you use your device by listening to your voice commands. Smart digital assistants can also be used to adjust settings in your home such as lighting or temperature.

## Recommendations for leisure activities

It is important to keep doing things you enjoy and adapt to your vision loss. Here are some tips:

- Line guides, rulers or coloured markers can help with reading.



- Sitting closer to the television or even slightly off to the side may make it easier to enjoy your favourite programs. Your eyes will not be harmed by sitting too close.
- Crosswords or playing cards are available in large print.
- Large print and digital talking books are available. You can visit your local library or Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada and ask what is available for visual impairments.
- It is important to keep active and socialize. Consider joining peer support walking groups, sport programs or other groups to keep your social connections strong.



## Impact on daily life

- Vision loss from stroke can impact your mobility and independence. White canes can help you judge distances like steps. You can get one from Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada.
- Stroke survivors have a higher risk of falling. To stay safe:
  - Remove clutter.
  - Use good lighting when walking around.
  - Make sure carpets don't slip.
  - Use railings on stairs. Adding different coloured tape on steps can improve contrast.



### Vision loss and hallucinations

Some people have visual hallucinations after a sudden loss of vision or visual field loss. This is called Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS).

Some people may see patterns, flowers, animals, or people that aren't real. These hallucinations usually go away. Speak to your doctor if you think you have this.

#### Strategies for visual hallucinations

There are no specific treatments for visual hallucinations, but there are various strategies which can help you cope. These include:

- If you are sitting, try standing up and moving around.
- Close and open your eyes.
- Switch a light on and off.
- Look at the hallucination or walk away from it.
- Understand the images are not real.

Talk to others, including your healthcare provider, about your experiences. Early recognition and support will reduce any concerns. For most people, the condition improves over time.

## Support

There is support for people who have had a stroke and vision loss. Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada or low vision clinics, optometrists, ophthalmologists, or occupational therapists can provide practical advice. Many strategies can be recommended to help you remain independent.



## Driving after a stroke

In Alberta, it is your legal responsibility to tell Alberta Transportation, Driver Fitness and Monitoring about any health issue that may affect your ability to drive safely, including that you had a stroke.



It is important to get guidance with the reporting process by discussing it with your rehabilitation team, nurse practitioner, or medical doctor. You can find more information about the process on the website: [alberta.ca/report-a-medical-condition.aspx](https://alberta.ca/report-a-medical-condition.aspx)

After a stroke, you should ask your medical team, or healthcare providers, whether you are safe to return to driving. If you have ongoing vision problems, you may not be able to return to driving.

Your doctor or vision specialist will be able to assess and offer advice on whether you meet vision requirements for driving.

Even if you feel that your vision is better, it is important you do not return to driving until you have been told by a medical professional that you are safe to do so and you get confirmation from Driver Fitness and Monitoring.

Your rehabilitation team or medical doctor may contact Alberta Transportation to advise them if you are ready to return to driving. You may need a special driving assessment before you return to driving.



## Additional resources

Alberta Health Services Stroke Care in Alberta  
[ahs.ca/stroke](https://ahs.ca/stroke)

MyHealth.Alberta.ca - Driving After a Stroke  
[myhealth.alberta.ca/health/AfterCareInformation/pages/conditions.aspx?HwId=custom.ab\\_stroke\\_driving\\_inst](https://myhealth.alberta.ca/health/AfterCareInformation/pages/conditions.aspx?HwId=custom.ab_stroke_driving_inst)

Government of Alberta Driver Medical Fitness  
[alberta.ca/driver-medical-fitness](https://alberta.ca/driver-medical-fitness)

Canadian Stroke Best Practices  
[strokebestpractices.ca/recommendations/stroke-rehabilitation-delivery/8-visual-and-visual-perceptual-impairment](https://strokebestpractices.ca/recommendations/stroke-rehabilitation-delivery/8-visual-and-visual-perceptual-impairment)

Heart and Stroke - Changes in Perception  
[heartandstroke.ca/stroke/recovery-and-support/emotions/changes-in-perception](https://heartandstroke.ca/stroke/recovery-and-support/emotions/changes-in-perception)

Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada (search for **Concentrated Programs > Stroke**)  
[visionlossrehab.ca](https://visionlossrehab.ca)

CNIB Smart Life Online (purchase of visual aids)  
[cnibsmartlife.ca](https://cnibsmartlife.ca)

Charles Bonnet Syndrome  
[aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-charles-bonnet-syndrome](https://aao.org/eye-health/diseases/what-is-charles-bonnet-syndrome)

Alberta Sports and Recreation Association for the Blind (or visually impaired)  
[asrab.ab.ca](https://asrab.ab.ca)

Hadley (offers practical help, connection and support to anyone with a visual impairment)  
[hadleyhelps.org](https://hadleyhelps.org)



This patient education material was reviewed in November 2024 by an interdisciplinary team of stroke, vision and rehabilitation specialists from across Alberta.

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