

Hearing

- If you believe you are experiencing hearing problems, tell your concerns to your GP. There may be a simple explanation, such as wax build up or an infection that can be treated by medication. Otherwise, your GP may refer you to an audiology clinic or specialist ear department.
- Hearing aids are available for free on the NHS, but only as advised by audiologists. They can also be bought privately. There are various types but your audiologist can advise you on what will suit your needs. The aids make sounds louder and may partially remove background noise.
- The RNID (Royal National Institute for Deafness) provides a telephone hearing check (charged at local rates) on 0845 600 55 55.
- There is other equipment available that can assist you at home – for instance vibrating pads or flashing lights to alert you when the doorbell rings. This may be loaned by your local social services or the RNID can advise you where you can purchase it yourself.
- Lip-reading classes – contact your local library, RNID or Hearing Concern.

Useful contacts

Vision

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)
105 Judd Street
London
WC1H 9NE

Helpline: 0303 123 9999
Web: www.rnib.org.uk

Your local library can also direct you to talking newspapers, magazines and books.

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Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)
19-23 Featherstone Street
London
EC1Y 8SL

Tel: 0808 808 0123 (freephone)
Text: 0808 808 9000 (freephone)
Web: www.rnid.org.uk

Vision, hearing and falls



A guide to how your vision and hearing changes as you get older, and the resources available to help.

Falls Prevention Service

As we age, changes in vision and hearing can increase the risk of falls. This guide aims to raise awareness of how these changes occur, how they can put you at risk, and what you can do to reduce these risks.

How do vision and hearing change as we age?

Vision

Changes can be age-related or secondary to other medical conditions, and can cause visual field disturbance, decreased contrast sensitivity (e.g. causing difficulty identifying kerbs or the edge of steps) and altered depth perception. The most common eye conditions later in life are:

- Cataracts – the lens inside the eye becomes cloudy, resulting in misty or blurred vision. Treatment is usually surgery to replace the lens with an artificial lens.
- Macular degeneration – deterioration of the macula (a part of the retina at the back of your eye). This causes problems (although not always a complete loss) with your central vision. Treatments for certain types of this condition include medication, injection or laser therapy.

- Glaucoma – damage to the optic nerve caused by fluid build-up, increasing pressure within the eye. This can ultimately lead to tunnel vision. Treatments to prevent loss of vision include eye drops, medication, laser or conventional surgery.
- Diabetic retinopathy – diabetes can cause damage to the blood vessels of the eye. There are a number of different types depending on where the damage occurs and the symptoms. Blockage or leaking of blood vessels can affect the retina and result in patchy or blurred vision, or loss of central vision. Early treatment to prevent deterioration is important, and includes laser treatment or surgery.

Hearing

Changes in hearing can be caused by:

- ear infections
- side-effects of certain medications (particularly aspirin in high doses and certain antibiotics)
- exposure to loud noise
- head injury
- diseases such as mumps or meningitis
- wax build up

These changes may affect the balance centre in your inner ear, thus increasing your risk of falls.

What can be done to reduce the risks?

Vision

- Eye tests are free for people over 60 years old – try to make sure you have an eye test annually, even if you think your sight is fine. Opticians do not only test your vision to see if you need glasses; they also are checking the general health of your eyes and looking for early signs of disease.
- It is rare for both eyes to require the same amount of correction, so ready-made reading glasses sold by shops or pharmacies should only be considered a temporary measure.
- Ensure sunglasses have UV protection, which will help to reduce sun damage to your eyes.
- Ensure you have sufficient lighting at home – 60 year olds require 3 times more light than 20 year olds.
- Blinds over windows allow you to control glare and direct light to where you need it. Also make sure you have adequate lighting at the top and bottom of stairs and where you do reading or work.