

# Visual Inattention/ Neglect After Stroke

Chest  
Heart &  
Stroke  
Scotland



## Contents

Key Points	2
What is visual processing?	3
Recognising visual inattention/neglect	4
Managing visual inattention/neglect	6
Scanning and awareness techniques	7

In this leaflet we present information on visual inattention as a spectrum. In severe cases this can be experienced as visual neglect. Visual inattention, or visual neglect, can happen with or without visual field loss.

## Key Points

- Visual processing is the way that visual information from the eyes is received and understood by the brain.
- A stroke can affect visual processing areas of the brain and change how you understand what you see.
- The most common visual processing issue is visual inattention/neglect. This is where your brain ignores everything on one side of your vision. For instance, only making up or shaving one side of your face or only eating food on one side of your plate.
- One way to help is to try a technique called scanning.
- People with inattention/neglect can be unaware of situations where their body is still attached to something. For example, a seatbelt still in the locked position or a leg attached to a chair/stool. It is important that family and carers offer verbal and, when required, physical guidance to reduce risk and increase awareness.
- People with visual inattention/neglect may appear disinterested because they seem to be ignoring conversations and interactions happening on their affected side.

# What is visual processing?

Visual processing is the way that visual information from your eyes is interpreted in your brain. If your stroke has affected the part of the brain which makes sense of vision, you may have issues with visual processing. This might mean, for example, that you have trouble recognising things or people on the affected side.

The most common form of visual processing issue is called **visual inattention or visual neglect**. This means that you can see everything in your visual field. But your brain only pays attention to things on one side.

This site has helpful videos further explaining this complex visual processing issue: [www.cviscotland/lessons](http://www.cviscotland/lessons).

People with visual neglect will ignore the affected side of their body and anything happening on that side (usually the left side).

For example, you might shave or apply make-up on only one side of your face. Or only eat what is on one side of your plate. You might also be at a higher risk of injuring the side affected by inattention/neglect because you have not seen the hazards on that side.

Visual inattention/neglect can exist alongside visual field loss, or on its own.

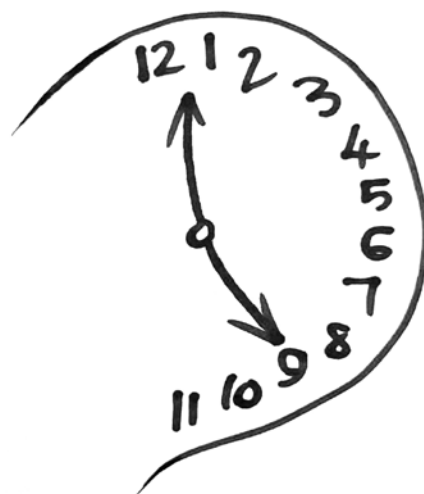
# Recognising visual inattention/neglect

The professionals who test for visual inattention/neglect are orthoptists, occupational therapists, and some qualified visual rehabilitation specialists.

The standardised assessment tool that many therapists are administering is the Visual Impairment Screening Assessment (VISA). One of the exercises on the standardised assessment requires the person to draw a clock.

People with visual neglect may draw only half the image, and/or put all the numbers on one side.

The image to the right shows an example of how people with visual neglect may draw a clock. The numbers are all clustered on the right-hand side of the image, and the left side of the drawing is completely absent.



You might also be asked to copy an image. People with visual neglect will only draw the elements on one side of the image.

## The image below has two halves.

The left half shows the original image. A cartoon house, with three windows and a door.

The right half shows how someone with visual neglect might copy the image. Anything left of the centre is limited or absent. The house now has only one window and one wall, both on the right side.



Image to be copied



Copy made by someone with visual neglect

# Managing visual inattention/neglect

Most often, you will be given scanning and awareness strategies to help you cope with the neglect. Unfortunately, if you have both visual field loss and inattention/neglect, you are less likely to respond to scanning techniques or compensate for the problem. This is where support from your carer, family, and friends becomes important. For example, it might be helpful if someone gives you reminders or tells you where things are.

Visual inattention/neglect may improve over time, making scanning techniques more effective. However, for some it may be permanent.

Looking at and observing your affected arm or leg before and during important tasks can sometimes improve awareness of the 'neglected' side. Even if your movement is very limited, this technique can still be helpful.

If you are experiencing fatigue after your stroke this can also make your visual inattention/neglect worse. You should try to avoid performing important or potentially high risk tasks when experiencing fatigue. For more on managing fatigue, see the CHSS booklet on **Tiredness and Fatigue**.

## Scanning and awareness techniques

We recommend getting professional advice from your orthoptist and/or visual rehabilitation specialist. They can provide vision awareness raising sessions to you, your family, and your care givers.

Scanning techniques are patterns of eye movement which encourage you to look at all parts of your vision. To practice, keep your head still and move your eyes around the room towards your affected side of vision.

Your vision healthcare team may be able to give you awareness exercises. These exercises aim to encourage and increase your awareness of objects and hazards to the side of inattention/neglect.

You might find it helpful to look at the other resources in this series on:

- **Vision after Stroke**
- **Visual Field Loss**
- **Double Vision**

# This factsheet is produced by three charities:



## **Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland**

Information, advice, and support for chest, heart, stroke, and Long Covid conditions.

Tel: **0808 801 0899**

Text: **ADVICE to 66777**

Email: **adviceline@chss.org.uk**

Web: **chss.org.uk**



## **Visibility Scotland**

Person-centred services to people of all ages affected by vision impairment and blindness, empowering them to reach their goals and aspirations.

Tel: **0800 987 1087**

Web: **visibilityscotland.org.uk**

Email: **info@visibilityscotland.org.uk**

**R N I B**

## **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)**

Information, support, and advice on living with sight loss and stroke-related eye conditions.

Tel: **0303 123 9999**

Email: **helpline@rnib.org.uk**

Web: **rnib.org.uk**

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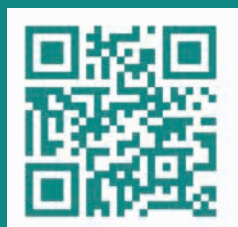


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You can also go to our website for information, advice and support: [www.chss.org.uk](http://www.chss.org.uk)

Find a range of easy-to-read booklets and factsheets at our resources hub:

[www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub](http://www.chss.org.uk/resources-hub)



Scan here to see all our resources!



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