

Information for Patients

Living with a hemianopia

What is a hemianopia?

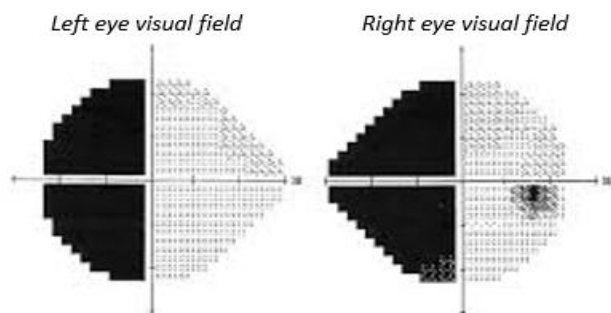
A hemianopia is where there is a loss of one half of your visual field. Hemianopia is caused by damage to the brain, for example, by a stroke, trauma or tumour. The extent of field loss can vary and depends of the area of your brain that has been affected. A homonymous hemianopia involves visual field loss on the same side of the visual field in both eyes. This may mean that you are not able to see to either the left or right from the centre of your field of vision.



This image shows a scene of a house with a garden as would be viewed with a full visual field.



This image shows the same scene as may be viewed with a left homonymous hemianopia. The left half of the scene is missing.



This is a visual field plot showing a left homonymous hemianopia. The black areas represent loss of the left half of the visual field in both eyes.

Having a hemianopia may make some of your everyday activities more challenging. For example, reading, safely navigating the environment, confidently interacting with others and doing some tasks around the house may become more difficult. There are various strategies that can be implemented that may help to make things easier.

Reading with a hemianopia

Reading can be more challenging with a hemianopia. If the left side of your vision is affected it will be more difficult to find the beginning of each line as you read. If the right side of your vision is affected it will be more difficult to find the end of each line. Here are some strategies that may help:

- Use a dark ruler or straight piece of card/paper to help keep your place as you read. You can put it at the beginning or end of lines to clearly mark where each line begins or ends, or you can put it underneath each line and move it down as you read.
- Actively try to increase the size of small eye movements as you read. Try to capture each word in your field of vision and to recognise it as the complete word before reading it.
- Hold the text at a 45 to 90 degree angle so that you can read vertically instead of horizontally. This strategy is likely to take practise to get used to. It aims to keep the text within the available field of vision.

Mobility with a hemianopia

Mobility and safely navigating the environment can be more challenging with a hemianopia. This is because you will be unable to use your peripheral vision to detect hazards and obstacles on the side with the visual field loss. It can be common to walk into obstacles, have more trips and falls, feel unsafe when out and about, or experience panic when in crowded or unfamiliar environments. Here are some strategies that may help:

- Actively try to scan around your environment more by using head and eye movements to look towards the side with the visual field loss.
- If you are out with somebody else, ask that person to walk on the side with the visual field loss.
- Some people may find a white cane helpful. There are different types of white cane:
 - Symbol canes simply make other people around you aware that you are visually impaired.
 - Long canes and guide canes can be used to find and avoid obstacles. These canes require training to learn how to use them effectively.

If you would like to try a cane we can signpost you to local services to choose the most suitable one for you and access any training (if necessary).

- Some people with a homonymous hemianopia may benefit from having a Peli prism lens fitted onto spectacles. The aim of this is to expand your peripheral visual field to aid mobility. A trial of a Peli prism lens can be discussed at a low vision assessment.

General advice and suggestions

- Make family, friends and carers aware of your visual field loss and how it affects you. It is helpful if they make sure to put any objects (e.g. hot drinks) on the side of your vision that you can see. They should also position themselves on the side of your vision that you can see when they are talking to you.
- Some people find that they miss food on one side of the plate when eating. Rotate your plate throughout your meal so that you are moving your food into the side of the vision that you can see.
- Any visual impairment can be emotionally challenging. There are many local and national services that can provide support to discuss feelings and experiences. These include Henshaws and the RNIB.

Certificate of visual impairment

If you have a hemianopia you may be eligible to get a Certificate of Visual Impairment and be registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired. This can help local authorities provide the best services for individuals with sight loss and entitle you to claim a range of benefits and concessions. A Consultant Ophthalmologist can certify you as having a visual impairment if you are eligible.

Driving

Standards for driving require a horizontal visual field of at least 120 degrees with at least 50 degrees on both the left and right. Most people with a hemianopia are unable to meet these standards and are **not** safe to drive. Any driver unable to meet the vision standards must **not** drive and must notify the DVLA. More detailed information about driving standards can be found on the GOV.UK website.

For more information and support or if you require further advice relating to the information in this leaflet please email the Optometry department on low.vision@mft.nhs.uk