

Acquired nystagmus

Ophthalmology / Orthoptic Service

Information for patients and carers

• Home • Community • Hospital
Caring for you

What is acquired nystagmus?

Acquired nystagmus is a condition of the eyes. It causes them to move or wobble / flicker without control. The movements can be:

- side to side
- up and down
- rotary
- a combination

What causes it?

Different parts of the brain are responsible for how we see information and how our eyes move.

Nystagmus can happen when these areas do not develop normally in early life or are damaged later in life.

It is often linked to other conditions, such as:

- ataxia
- multiple sclerosis (MS)
- a brain tumour
- a head injury
- as a side effect of medicines

For some people, nystagmus is temporary and may improve over time. For others, it can also have a long-term impact on vision.

Symptoms

People who develop nystagmus later in life may experience a constant feeling that the world is moving. This is called oscillopsia.

This can cause:

- nausea
- dizziness
- blurred vision

For some people, oscillopsia may be a short-term condition that gets better over time. Other people may have it long-term and learn ways to manage it.

Treatment

Treatment changes for each person. Some people can continue driving and live normally. Others may need help to complete everyday tasks.

Depending on the cause, medicines may be prescribed, such as muscle relaxants to reduce eye movements.

Botox injections may help some people who have nystagmus because of MS. This can help to paralyse the ocular muscles, which reduces nystagmus.

Support available

Eye clinic liaison officer (ECLO)

An eye clinic liaison officer (ECLO) is based in the hospital and works closely the eye clinic team. They offer:

- information
- practical advice
- emotional support
- help to manage sight loss and maintain independence

Certifications

If vision is reduced enough, a consultant may certify you as:

- sight impaired (SI)
- severely sight impaired (SSI)

Driving

If you drive and have acquired nystagmus, you must tell the DVLA.

Some people can still drive but this depends on if they meet the legal standards required for vision.

Lifestyle adaptations

- Increase the contrast at home. For example, between doorways, handles and stairs.
- Adjust your mobile phones or device settings to increase or magnify text.
- Reduce glare by changing your screen colour.
- Practise walking to work or specific routes to build confidence and independence.

Contacts and further information

Orthoptic Team

Phone: 01925 662772

Contact the Orthoptic Team directly if you have any concerns about your care or changes in your condition.

RNIB

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/>

Nystagmus Network

<https://nystagmusnetwork.org/>