

# SEND Bulletin NO. 17

Most children have no idea  
how they are supposed to see.  
So when words look like this,  
they assume everyone sees  
the same way.

 Valli  
OPTICIANS

## Visual Stress

Visual Stress is a perceptual processing condition that causes reading difficulties, headaches and visual problems from exposure to patterns in text, such as lines of text. Visual Stress is linked to dyslexia and similar visual learning difficulties. Sufferers experience print distortion and fatigue when reading.

Visual Stress is also known as Meares-Irlen syndrome, after the two researchers who first discovered the connection between white page glare and reading difficulties. The severity of these symptoms can vary from person to person, with approximately 20% of the population suffering to some degree.

## Key characteristics

Problems reading and writing.

Eye strain.

Problems with depth perception (clumsiness and an inability to judge distances well)

Distortions in writing (words can appear to move or appear blurry)

Moving text – when reading, you may find that text moves around the page, jumps around or even disappears. It can also appear to swirl around and blur, making it incredibly difficult to focus on the text.

Letters morphing – in addition to text moving around is the morphing of text. Text can change size or shape and you may experience letters getting darker or fading away.

White background becomes the focus – this is when the reader sees ‘white rivers’ or ‘worms’ winding throughout the words of a page. This is due to the focus being on the background over the black text.

Random colours appearing – you may experience rings or blobs of colour surrounding the text on a page.

Physical discomfort – sufferers may find they get tired quickly when reading and get headaches or migraines. They may also experience sore, watering eyes that are visibly red. Aside from the symptoms that occur when reading text, someone that experiences visual stress may find they also have these more generalised symptoms.

Sensitivity to bright light – Those who suffer from visual stress can find bright lights, fluorescent lights in particular, extremely uncomfortable to be around. This extends to bright, reflective surfaces, interactive whiteboards and any other high contrast surfaces.

Distorted depth perception and spatial awareness – If you have visual stress, you may find it difficult to judge distances and space around you.

## Support strategies

**Coloured overlays and tinted lenses** – one of the most common methods for easing the symptoms of visual stress is to use tinted overlays and glasses. These can help to reduce the distortion and movement of letters, creating a more comfortable reading environment that will allow children to better understand the content.

**Adjusting lighting** – Light is often one of the biggest influences on visual stress, so make sure you are creating an environment that supports the student. If working on a computer or a tablet, then try adjusting the brightness and contrast of the screen to create the optimal setting – this will often be a process of trial & error until the optimal lighting levels are found.

**Text formatting** – making sure the font size and spacing are even and choose fonts such as Calibri, Comic Sans and Trebuchet MS.

**Take regular breaks** – taking regular breaks through long reading sessions to help reduce frustration and strain on the eyes.

## Support agencies

[www.eyesite.co.uk](http://www.eyesite.co.uk)

[www.bdadyslexia.org.uk](http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk)

If you have any interesting information or resources which you would like to share with your colleagues via this fortnightly bulletin, please e-mail them to me:

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Many thanks  
Anne