

Keeping you informed of local sight loss news

**Visible**

Winter 2020/Spring 2021  
**Wiltshire Edition**

in association with

**Sight**  
SUPPORT 

WILTSHIRE  
**Sight**

**The Moving Forward series** is designed to offer help to people who are adjusting to life with sight loss. Each session will provide practical advice and a chance to learn from other's personal experiences. Sessions are open to anyone adjusting to life with sight loss, including friends and family members and people can join by phone or zoom. **Monday afternoons and evenings (weekly)**



**First Steps** - Being diagnosed with sight loss can be a confusing time, if you do not know what direction to turn, this session will answer your questions. **2pm - 3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**You are not alone** - This session will focus on the benefits of speaking to others, how to overcome some of the anxieties faced and the options available. **2pm-3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Read, Write, and Learn** - From large print to magnifiers, to courses to help develop your skills, find out more on our read, write and learn session. **2pm-3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Kitchen Skills** - From helpful gadgets to tips and tricks, find out how you can continue to enjoy cooking, baking, and eating good food. **2pm - 3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Getting out and about** - Whether it is cane, canine or simply some little life hacks to aid your mobility, find out more during this session. **2pm-3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Rekindling your interests** - hobbies, sports & leisure: helping you continue to enjoy the things you love. **2pm-3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Everyday accessible tech** - everyday devices you might already have, or that are inexpensive to purchase. **2pm - 3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Specialist Tech** - hi-tech solutions to everyday barriers. **2pm - 3pm & 7.30pm 8.30pm**



**Appy days** - there is an app for everything and here is your chance to find out some of our favourites. **2pm - 3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**



**Employment** - whether you are in work or looking for work, we have got it covered in our talk about employment. **2pm - 3pm & 7.30pm - 8.30pm**

If you would like to join any or all of the sessions please call the Wiltshire Sight team on **01380 723682** or email [info@wiltshiresight.org](mailto:info@wiltshiresight.org).

# Welcome to our latest edition of Visible

At the start of 2020, who would have predicted the challenges we would all face this year? It feels like the ground is constantly shifting, and our challenge throughout has been to ensure we can adapt our services and continue to provide support to people across the region.

In this issue you can read more about our new befriending service and how it has made a real difference to people living alone. Having someone to talk to can make all the difference, particularly as the winter draws in. Our befriending volunteers and staff will be working hard to make sure that everyone continues to have someone they can talk to.

This edition introduces our new tablet training course, designed to help people who are new to technology to connect with family and friends. And you can find out more about our new Charles Bonnet Syndrome group to help people share experiences and support each other.

We continue to seek new ways of working to make sure people have access to the support they need.

We don't know what the next challenges will be. But we do know that thanks to our supporters we will be there to meet them. We are a small, local charity and every penny makes a huge difference. If you can, please consider donating. Our contact details are on the back page, or you can go online to donate quickly and easily at [wiltshiresight.org/donate](http://wiltshiresight.org/donate). Thank you.

As always, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our staff and volunteers for their on-going commitment - you've been fantastic. With your continued support and dedication, we will get through this, and continue to provide local support for many years to come.

With best wishes,

**Mike Silvey**  
Chief Executive

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.



## **Kitchen tips and recipes**

Our Rehabilitation Officers, Paula and Zoë, have put together a brief guide to cooking and kitchen skills for people with visual impairments. The guide covers safety, hints and tips, specialist equipment, and some simple recipes for those venturing back into the kitchen. We can send out hard copies in large print, or recorded on USB sticks, free of charge.

## **Charity shop – community hub?**

As part of our fundraising strategy, Wiltshire Sight is exploring the potential of opening one or two charity shops, which could not only raise income to help keep our services running, but could also operate as community hubs to provide sight loss advice and support. Our challenge is to find the right premises – if you know of any potential retail premises for rent near you, or would be keen to help us develop something in your area, please let us know!

## **New Low Vision Service**

Are you waiting for a low vision assessment? With waiting lists in so many areas approaching a year, we have been working with the University of the West of England to provide more capacity, with the opening of a new Low Vision Clinic in north Bristol. The clinic is now open for free-of-charge low vision assessments every Tuesday. Low vision assessments are conducted by a qualified Optometrist, and an advisor from our partner charity, Sight Support West of England will be working alongside the Optometrist to ensure clients have access to advice, guidance and support on resources and daily living after the assessment. This is an exciting opportunity to provide a joined-up service in the new clinic, combining both the professional assessment and support and advice services. As with all health settings, the clinic is well set-up to keep clients safe, with all staff operating with full PPE. If you can get to north Bristol and would like to make an appointment, call the clinic on 0117 328 3300.

## **Lanyards**

We still have some of our bright yellow lanyards available free of charge, which were produced in the summer in response to concerns from clients about the difficulties of social distancing. The lanyards have the words 'Visually Impaired' in big letters on them with the symbol of visual impairment underneath. If you would like a lanyard, give us a call and we'll put one in the post to you.



# Meet our Rehabilitation Team

Hello everyone. We are Paula Hickey and Zoë Austen, Rehabilitation Officers. We joined Sight Support (Wiltshire Sight's partner charity), a year ago to continue the provision of the rehabilitation service previously managed by RNIB.



We have been working together on the visual impairment rehabilitation service for many years now, having met when we were training. We cover just the South Gloucestershire area, but each local authority has its own rehabilitation team. We'd like to give you an insight into what rehabilitation is about, how it may help you and how to get this type of support if you need it.

After receiving a Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI) from the eye hospital you should be offered an assessment to ensure you get the support and information needed which may include rehabilitation.

***A Rehabilitation Officer would work with you to identify areas you would like to work on and develop***

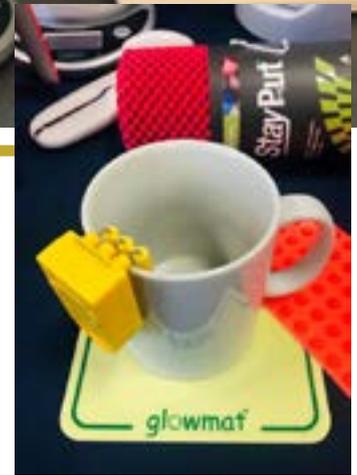


A Rehabilitation Officer would work with you to identify areas you would like to work on and develop. We provide training, advice and information to help people regain and maintain as much independence as possible based around the practical aspects of living with a visual impairment. The actual rehabilitation training includes an initial assessment to identify and explore challenges and goals.

These can cover domestic tasks around the house including pouring, cooking skills, preparing food, getting back to baking, marking and using kitchen equipment, home organisation, housework, managing aspects of personal care and any practical tasks that are becoming difficult.



Rehabilitation also offers training and support with regards to orientation and mobility needs both inside and outside, helping regain independence in this area. We offer sighted guide training and training on the use of a range of different types of canes, from the symbol cane (to alert others) through to the use of the long cane to help find obstacles and kerbs for example. We also offer orientation training to help people use mobility skills to safely navigate routes and build confidence to get out and about.



Communications is also an area covered and includes reading and writing, use of low vision aids, colour and contrast, talking clocks and watches, use of some technology, task lighting and possibly alternative communication methods such as Braille and Moon. Within all these areas Rehabilitation Officers will offer a wide range of ideas and tips to help with everyday tasks, and assess for appropriate equipment to aid independence and provide training in use of the equipment. All training is adapted to individuals and their specific eye conditions, as we know sight loss affects everyone in different ways.

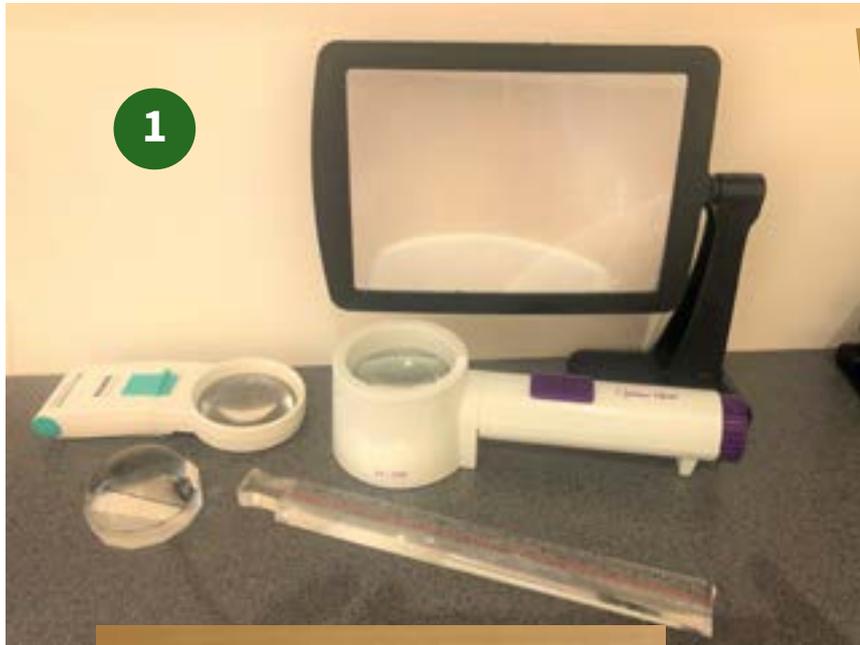
If you feel that this type of support could help you, please get in touch and we can refer you to your local rehabilitation team for support.

*Take care Paula and Zoë*

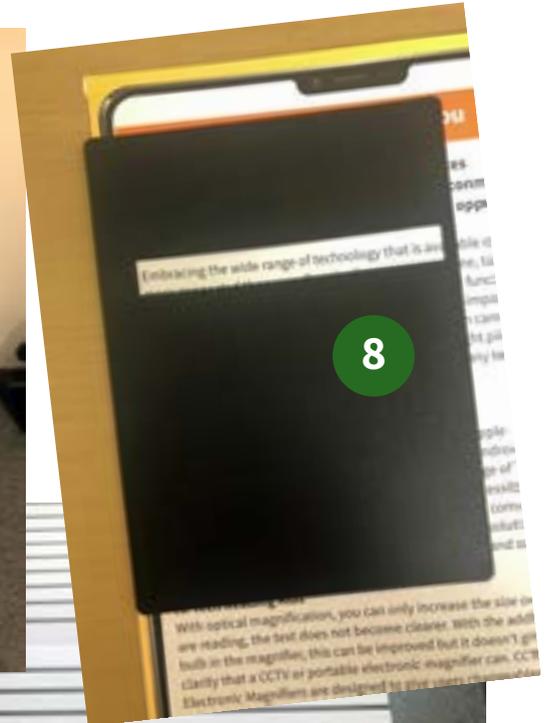
# Tips and Tricks for Reading and Writing



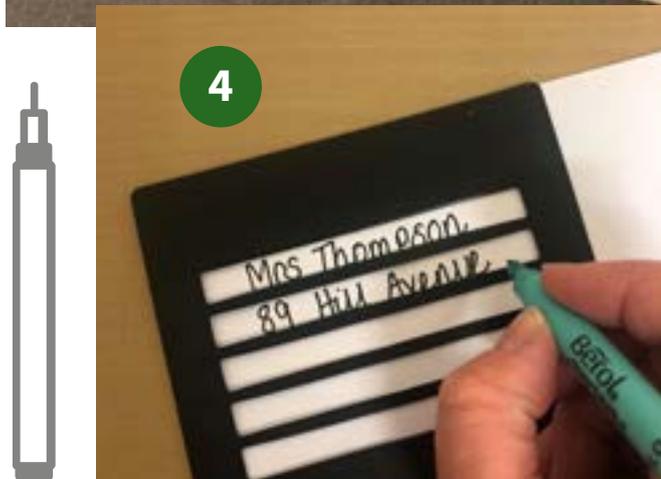
*Continuing our Tips and Tricks feature, in this edition we'd like to share some ideas for reading and writing.*



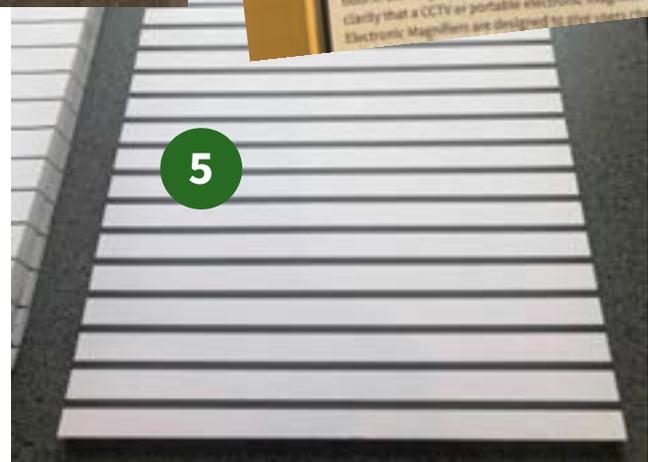
1



8



4



5

1

Magnifiers can be helpful when reading. Optical magnification will increase the text size but not necessarily the clarity, you can choose a magnifier with an added daylight bulb or you can go hi tech with an electronic magnifier that will change contrast and colours. The starting point to getting the right strength magnification is the low vision assessment, if you contact us we can advise you how to get one.

2

Audio books are available from Wiltshire Sight, we have a growing catalogue and will loan you the audio discs free of charge. Large print and talking books are also available from local libraries and national charities like Calibre and RNIB.

There are also local and national talking newspapers and a range of magazines, some are free, some require subscription. Digital options are also available.

- 3 Keeping reading and writing material flat and stable can be helped by using a clipboard and allows you to move items to where is best for you.
- 4 Consider changing your Biro to a darker and thicker type of pen.
- 5 When writing shopping lists, cards and signing forms there are a range of writing guides which can help to keep writing straight. There is also thick lined paper available.
- 6 If making notes for yourself, use larger sheets of paper and write as large as you need, if this helps.
- 7 A range of large print calendars, diaries and address books are available from a variety of suppliers, we have a small stock in our Devizes resource centre and you can purchase one over the phone.
- 8 If you have trouble following lines when reading or have issues with glare, then reading guides (Typoscopes) can help and come in a range of sizes for different page sizes.
- 9 Most companies offer their print information in alternative format such as large print. Each company would need to be contacted to set this up.
- 10 Last but not least, using additional lighting such as desk lamps can help with reading and writing tasks.

Desk lighting comes in various shapes and sizes with a range of fittings and types of illumination and the right one for you depends on your preference and your eye condition. We have a selection in our resource centres for you to try out before you commit to buying, along with most of the other aids mentioned in our tips and tricks section.

If you find our tips and tricks section useful and would like to check out other topics such as cooking, gardening, travel, money and more, you can visit our website or call us for a large print or audio version. If you have tips you'd like to share please send them to us at [handyhints@wiltshiresight.org](mailto:handyhints@wiltshiresight.org)



At the time of going to print we will be in another lockdown. We will continue to provide services to the best of our abilities during this period and our Sight Loss Advisors are available every day to provide information, advice and guidance on all issues around living with sight loss.

Our resource centres remain open for prebooked appointments and we will return to our community-based service as soon as possible. In the meantime please talk to a Sight Loss Adviser and we will offer face to face appointments where required, observing COVID-safe procedures. For more information or to book for any of the services below, please call 01380 723682 or email [info@wiltshiresight.org](mailto:info@wiltshiresight.org)

## Book an appointment

Our Sight Advisors are available Monday-Friday 10-4 to offer information and advice on assistive technology, lighting, magnifiers and much more to help you manage your sight loss. Appointments can be made at St. Lucy's Sight Centre in Devizes; please call to discuss your needs. Booking is essential.



## Local support groups

We normally offer support groups in various locations across Wiltshire and Swindon, providing opportunities for advice or just to chat with other visually impaired people. We currently have two support groups in Melksham and Calne that are continuing to meet via phone and will resume face-to-face as soon as the current lockdown period ends. These are:

- **Melksham Support Group Fortnightly on a Friday afternoon.**
- **Calne Support Group Fortnightly on a Tuesday afternoon.**

Other groups are on hold for now as we have not had sufficient interest in running the meetings over the phone, but please let us know if you would like to join a phone or online group in your area and we will do our best to link people up. We will of course re-start all groups face-to-face when it is safe to do so.



## Join a telephone or online group

We are also offering the following opportunities to connect with others remotely; all our sessions can be accessed both by telephone and online.

- **Esme's Friends – Wednesday afternoon (monthly)** Esme's Friends is a monthly support group for those who live with Charles Bonnet Syndrome. If you experience hallucinations you are invited to join us, whether you just want to learn more about the condition and coping strategies, listen to other people's experiences, or to share your own experiences.
- **Moving Forward Series – Monday afternoons and evenings (weekly)** The Moving Forward series is designed to offer help to people who are adjusting to life with sight loss. The full schedule can be found on page 2.
- **Sight Support Sports Talk – Wednesday evening (fortnightly)** If you want to learn more about VI sport opportunities in your area, talk to others about sport, make new friends and get inspired, then this is the place for you. Each session takes a theme, but the floor is open to discussion on all topics sport related.

## Other Services

**Befriending-** If you would like to receive regular telephone calls, we can match you with one of our telephone befrienders, who will call for a friendly chat at a time which is convenient for you.

**Audio Library-** Membership for our audio library is free. Audio books are in audio CD format, available on loan and posted to you free of charge with a self-return envelope.

# Inside Our Resource Centres

Our Resource Centres in Bristol and Devizes are packed with resources to try, from daily living aids, through to phones and tablets. In Spring, when we had to temporarily suspend face to face services, we took the opportunity to refresh our centres to make them more useful, more accessible, and Covid-secure.

In Devizes we've changed the layout, making it lighter and more welcoming. Freshly painted walls have enabled us to have better colour contrast between the walls, doorways and cupboard units. In both centres we have sectioned off areas to categorise types of resources making it easier for you (and us!) to find what you want. We know that everyone's needs and preferences are different, so we have worked hard to pull together a range of equipment from different suppliers for you to try out, to find what works for you.



As you probably know, there is a whole wealth of technology and daily living aids available on the market, all varying in specification and price. It can be overwhelming, not to mention expensive, to try and find the right thing for you. Sometimes you may not know what it is you need and want. That's where our Sight Loss Advisors come in- they are trained to support you in identifying the right resources for your needs, be it hi-tech magnification to assist you in your work environment or lighting to keep you going with your favourite hobby. We can help you find the right assistive technology to make daily life that bit easier.

The range of equipment includes electronic handheld magnifiers, optical magnifiers, smart speakers, USB players, radios, entertainment (such as large print crosswords to Scrabble and Dominos), clocks and watches, kitchen equipment, lighting and mobile phones and tablets.

We are not a shop, but we do carry some stock to sell, if we don't have an item to you want to purchase we can advise you where to purchase it or we can order it to be delivered to your home.

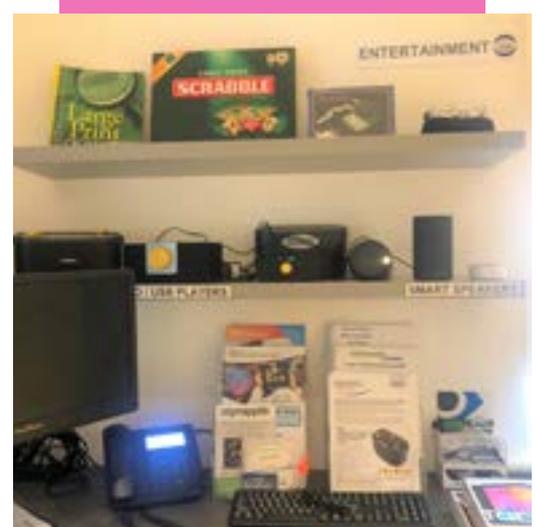
So, what can you expect when you visit our resource centres? Of course, that depends on your needs and your situation. On a first visit you might expect to have a chat with a Sight Loss Advisor, you might want to discuss specific areas where you need support or tasks that you have been struggling with. Our hope is that we can show you something that can help make life that little bit easier, or even make possible something you thought you could not achieve.

In addition to resources, our centres also stock a large range of information and advice leaflets, from eye condition information to benefits advice to other organisations who can help. You might want to come and just have a chat with a Sight Loss Advisor, or to have some training on a specific piece of technology, or how to use your magnifier better. You might want to bring your own phone or tablet so we can help you make it more accessible.

We've made a few changes to the way we work, in these times of Covid, to make our centres as safe and secure as possible. Firstly, we offer an appointment-only service, limiting the number of people in the building. We have erected screens to reduce any transmission risk. We have a strict cleaning policy so you can rest assured that surfaces and equipment have been fully cleaned before your arrival. Making you feel safe and comfortable is very important to us.

Both of our resource centres are accessibly located on the ground floor. We have parking spaces if someone is bringing you or we can advise you how to reach us by public transport.

To make an appointment call  
**01380 723682 for Devizes**  
**0117 322 4885 for Bristol**





Feeling isolated is a common challenge for people with sight loss and often a welcome voice can provide emotional support. In March this year Wiltshire Sight started a befriending service. With many people being stuck at home, often alone, and lots of people being unable to work, we advertised for volunteers to help make a difference. Our befriending volunteers offer a friendly voice on the phone on a regular basis. They are great listeners and happy to share interests and experiences. We have volunteers with varied backgrounds from all walks of life and we will match you up with someone who has similar interests or may be in your local area.

We have shared 2 different stories.

## **Rob, Volunteer Befriender**

“Hi, I’m Rob, I’m 26 years old and work as an engineer at Airbus. I moved to Bristol around three years ago after graduating from university



and really enjoy living in this city. I try to keep active by playing squash and going sailing, although during the lockdown I’ve had to resort to running and cycling to get some exercise outdoors! At the start of lockdown I was looking for ways to support some of the vulnerable people who were being most affected and becoming a telephone befriender looked like a great way to make a difficult situation slightly easier for someone.

I really look forward to my weekly phone calls with Steve and hearing about what he’s been up to. It’s been especially satisfying for me to see how he has adapted to the lockdown, and I’ve also learnt lots about some of his hobbies like his music DJ’ing. Steve and I have a regular call each week where I call him and then we have a conversation about what we’ve each been up to and how we’re feeling. Some weeks our calls last 15 minutes while other weeks we have lots to talk about and we speak for up to an hour. It’s completely flexible between us - if one of us is especially busy with work we sometimes rearrange the call to a better time.

I would strongly recommend it - it’s been so rewarding for me personally to get to know Steve and I hope I’ve helped make the last few months slightly easier for him.”

## Joan, Befriendee

Joan is visually impaired and expressed an interest in joining the befriending service because she was feeling a bit isolated, so through the befriending service she was hooked up with Emma, another of our volunteers. Joan has continued to have regular chats with Emma throughout the summer. Here's what Joan had to say about her befriending experience.



“It's always delightful and much appreciated. I would recommend it to people, especially those who are alone, it's lovely to have the call to look forward to and you never know what you're going to talk about as it varies so much. We talk about anything and everything that crops up, sometimes I talk about what I've done through the week and other times we've had conversations about things that happened years ago, reminiscing about things that happened when I was growing up and sharing those memories with Emma. Emma is a great listener and lots of fun.

I really look forward to the calls, it's good to have someone different to talk to, and I would feel more isolated without the regular conversations as I don't go out much apart from going to the post box to return my talking books.

I belong to other groups but I often don't attend the telephone calls because I have hearing loss and I find it difficult to know what's being said, I prefer having a one to one talk, it works much better for me.

I was part of some local social groups but none have restarted due to social distancing, I'm really looking forward to being able to go to some groups in person but until then I look forward to my telephone conversations and would highly recommend it to anyone in my situation.”

The befriending service has been a real success and we continue to look for friendly and confident volunteers to join our team. All our volunteers receive an induction and training and are fully supported by Becs, our Volunteer Co-ordinator. If you think you could benefit from becoming a befriender or receiving regular calls from one of our team, then please give Becs a call on **01380 723682** or email **becs.thurgar@wiltshiresight.org**.

# Uncovering Charles Bonnet Syndrome

Do you see things that you know are not real? Have you been worried that you have a mental health problem or dementia? You might be experiencing what is known as Charles Bonnet Syndrome.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS) – in which visual hallucinations occur in psychologically normal people – can develop in anyone who has lost over 60% of their vision. Clinical studies have estimated between 20-40% of vision-impaired people experience CBS.

## What is it like to have CBS?

Hallucinations may be simple patterns, or detailed images of events, people, or places. People might have peculiar aspects to them such as a distorted face or be adorned in exotic costume. Some encounter scenes of marching soldiers who are miniature in size or a human being who is as large as a house. A few even find themselves in a completely different environment to where they are.

Occasionally the person finds the images pleasant and a welcome addition to their lives. For others, CBS is experienced as unpleasant and stressful; hallucinations might be very intrusive and disorienting.

## What causes CBS?

Modern neuroscience cannot yet explain why some people with vision loss develop the syndrome while others do not; or why Charles Bonnet images often possess stunning detail combined with curiously odd aspects. Whilst the actual cause of CBS remains largely unknown, a few clinical studies have provided insight into why CBS occurs.

The brain is used to receiving visual information via the eyes. When this visual input is absent the brain reacts by becoming restless. Modern brain scanning equipment has confirmed that when a CBS-affected person 'sees' a phantom image, specific cells within the visual region of the brain are over-active and firing spontaneously. It is this firing that seems to be producing the CBS images.

## Strategies for managing CBS

Whilst effective treatment for CBS is yet to be found, there are several effective strategies for managing hallucinations.

Since lack of sensory stimulation appears to be a crucial factor in CBS, opportunities to stimulate the other senses are recommended. This could include listening to talking books, engaging with others, playing music, undertaking some creative task, physical exercise, or some tactile activity (e.g. knitting, gardening or even tapping the table).

Other strategies include:

- When the hallucination starts, look from left to right about once every second for 15 seconds without moving your head.
- Reach out towards the hallucination, try and touch it, or sweep your hand to brush away the image.
- Shine a torch upwards from below your chin in front of your eyes (not into your eyes).
- If sitting, try standing up and walking round the room. If standing, try sitting.
- Walk into another room or another part of the room.
- Turn your head slowly to one side and then the other. Dip your head to each shoulder in turn.
- Stare straight at the hallucination.
- Change whatever it is you are doing at that moment – turn off/turn on the television/radio/music.
- Change the light level in the room. It might be the dim light that is causing the hallucinations. If so, turn on a brighter light – or vice versa.
- At night, try wearing a thick eye mask.
- Blink your eyes slowly once or twice.

Wiltshire Sight has a new monthly support group called Esme's Friends for those who live with CBS. Many people who experience CBS discover that sharing their experiences with others helps. If you experience hallucinations you are invited to join us, whether you just want to learn more about the condition and coping strategies, listen to other people's experiences, or to share your own experiences.

# Staying Positive in Lockdown



In March nobody could have foreseen the huge impact the pandemic was going to have on all our lives. Many of us are finding things very hard. The mental health charity Mind has compiled some tips to help you look after your mental wellbeing, especially when you have to stay at home. We have included a few of them here:

- **Decide on your routine** Sticking to a regular routine if possible can help when things feel uncertain. This might be keeping regular times for getting up, going to sleep and doing household tasks. If you aren't happy with your routine, use this as a chance to change it.
- **Get as much natural light as you can** Try to plan your day to get the most out of natural light. For example, wrap up and spend time in the garden or on a walk, or position a seat by a window to get the most of the light.
- **Try to stay active** Try and bring some activity into your routine. It could be a short walk, dancing to music, cleaning your house, or doing workouts or gentle seated exercises. Find something that feels right for you.
- **Fresh air can really help** If you can't go on a walk, try spending time sitting on your doorstep, balcony or in the garden. Open the windows to let in fresh air - this can help even for a short time, if it's too cold to open them for a long period.
- **Connect with people** Try to arrange telephone or video calls with people you'd usually see in person. Or why don't you try contacting people you haven't seen in a while?
- **Find ways to relax or be creative** You could subscribe to your local Talking Newspaper or an Audio Book Service. Using our creative sides and being in the present moment can be good for our wellbeing. You could try things like art, sewing, writing, playing or making music, mindfulness, meditation or yoga.
- **Take care with social media** Social media can help us stay in touch with people, but it might also make us anxious particularly when people are sharing upsetting news stories or posting about their worries. Consider taking a break to look after yourself, or change how you use it.

**More information and tips can be found on Mind's website or you can call their information line on 0300 123 3393.**

# Tablets aren't just for swallowing!



Do you feel that you are being left behind in an increasingly digital world?

Would you like to be able to talk to your family on a video call, order groceries online, or just learn a bit more about 'how it all works'?

Whilst many of us have moved our daily lives and routines to online platforms, we know there are many of you who feel locked out of the digital world.

**Wiltshire Sight has developed a course called 'Tablets Aren't Just for Swallowing'**, specifically designed for people who are blind and partially sighted who may have never seen, touched or used a tablet device.



The course is delivered one-to-one and our trained Sight Advisors will move at a pace comfortable for you. We are confident we can help you develop the skills, knowledge, and confidence from a very basic understanding of what it means to be part of the digital world, to ordering your weekly food shop using a touch screen product.

*If you think it will be 'too hard' or that you are 'too old to learn something new', please let us prove you wrong!*

***If you or someone you know is losing their sight or living with sight loss, we can help.***

Call us on 01380 723682 for Wiltshire and Swindon

Email - [info@wiltshiresight.org](mailto:info@wiltshiresight.org)

Call us on 0117 3224885 for Bristol, Bath and South Gloucestershire

Email - [info@sightsupportwest.org.uk](mailto:info@sightsupportwest.org.uk)

**[www.wiltshiresight.org](http://www.wiltshiresight.org)**

Wiltshire Sight is registered in England and Wales under charity number 1119462 and company number 6060187

Wiltshire Sight, St. Lucy's Sight Centre, Browfort, Bath Road, Devizes, SN10 2AT

## **Can you help with a donation?**

We hope you've enjoyed reading about all the ways we're rising to the challenges of this year. We are committed to making sure that no-one is left behind as the world continues to change.

We know that there will be even more challenges for people over the winter months. And we know that we will carry on providing help when it's needed most, to people across our region, in the safest possible way.

We can only do this work thanks to our generous supporters. We are a small, local charity and every penny will make a huge difference. If you can, please consider donating. You can do this by contacting us on the details above or you can go online to donate quickly and easily at

**[www.wiltshiresight.org/donate](http://www.wiltshiresight.org/donate)**

***Thank you for your support***