

## Visual symptoms



Multiple sclerosis information

# Welcome to this Choices booklet about visual symptoms

MS-UK believes we must listen to the voices of people affected by multiple sclerosis (MS) to shape the information and support we provide. It is these people that bring us perspectives that no one else can give.

For every Choices booklet we produce, MS-UK consults the wider MS community to gather feedback and uses this to inform our content. All of our Choices booklets are then reviewed by the MS-UK Virtual Insight Panel before they are published.

This Choices booklet has been designed with you in mind. We hope it will answer some of your questions and also provide some first-hand experience from those who have been in your position - people who can truly understand and empathise with your current thoughts and feelings.

**Every time you find bold text with quotation marks like this, it is a quote directly from someone affected by multiple sclerosis**

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# Visual symptoms

Visual symptoms are common amongst people with multiple sclerosis (MS).

There are three main visual symptoms in MS – optic neuritis, nystagmus and diplopia (double vision). Some people also experience temporary blurring of vision, temporary loss of vision, blind spots, pain with eye movement and blind spots.

**Accept that it can take time to focus. Just sit down, relax, and wait. A cold flannel across the eyes helps me**

Visual problems are often the first symptoms associated with MS (1).

**I keep things in their place so I know where they are. Wear sunglasses, and have large-print letters sent**

## Optic neuritis

Optic neuritis is a common symptom in MS. It is caused by inflammation or demyelination to the optic nerve at the back of the eye, which transmits the signals from the visual image from the eye to the brain (1).

Optic neuritis causes a disturbance in vision – sometimes blurring, and often a reduction in colour vision, particularly for the colour red. Optic neuritis can also cause a headache, or a pain behind the eye when the eye moves (2).

**I use magnifying glasses for close up work and always try to have a magnifying glass in my pocket if I'm out in order to read menus and so on**

Visual flashing sensations can be present and over half of those affected by optic neuritis will experience Uhthoff's sign – in which symptoms worsen with heat or exhaustion. (3)

Optic neuritis is a variable condition where vision can be moderately to severely affected. It usually occurs in one eye but can occur in both eyes at the same time (2).

Optic neuritis starts suddenly and progresses for a few weeks

before recovery happens spontaneously. Treatment with steroids may be advised by your MS nurse to help reduce inflammation and hopefully help speed up recovery (2).

If the optic nerve is damaged by demyelination a permanent loss of visual acuity (acuteness or clearness of vision), may be experienced.

## Nystagmus

Nystagmus is a condition in which the eyes move involuntarily. The movement is usually horizontal, but it can also be vertical or rotary. In almost all cases, both eyes move together. There are two main types of nystagmus, one which appears in the first months of life which is called congenital nystagmus and another which develops later in life which is usually called acquired nystagmus (4).

**Get your eyes checked by an optician and speak to your MS team**

Acquired nystagmus is most common in people with MS and although they may be initially unaware of these involuntary movements, they may notice movement themselves in a mirror or it could be observed by others. Nystagmus will be diagnosed by an ophthalmologist who will examine the inside of your eyes and test your vision. Diagnosing

acquired nystagmus may also require a referral to a neurologist (5).

Although acquired nystagmus is quite a common symptom, treatment of this condition is limited at present. Drug therapy with gabapentin or memantine may help (6). Botulinum toxin injections have also been shown to help some people with the acquired form of nystagmus associated with MS (7).

## Diplopia

Diplopia, or double vision, can be a very early symptom of MS. It is caused when the pair of muscles that control a particular eye movement are weakened. The muscles then become uncoordinated, and this disturbs the vision by producing images in double. It may also cause loss of balance because spatial orientation, that ability of a person to correctly determine his/her body position in space, is disturbed. Double vision is usually temporary. It can occur through fatigue or over-use of the eyes. For example, too much time spent on a computer or reading for a long time. Resting the eyes periodically throughout the day can be beneficial (8).

If you experience double vision, talk to your GP or MS nurse about a referral to an ophthalmologist.

**You can get prism glasses for double vision.  
Rest your eyes from screens when necessary**

# Nutrition, supplements and eye health

The key vitamins for eye health are the antioxidants – vitamins A, C and E, lutein and zeaxanthin. These support eye health and are all found in fruits and vegetables. Lutein is found in mango, yellow peppers and green leafy vegetables such as kale, chard, broccoli and cavolo nero. Zeaxanthin is found in orange sweet peppers, citrus fruits such as oranges and tangerines, broccoli, corn, spinach and eggs. These types of food also provide vitamins A, C and E. If you have a healthy diet with a good balance of fruit and vegetables, then you will get all the vitamins you need from your food, although you can choose to supplement these vitamins (9).

**I tolerated it until diagnosis and then ate punnets and punnets of blueberries to reduce the inflammation. Now very rare occasional relapses with slight blurring**

## Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for a healthy immune system, brain development and function and the cardiovascular system (heart and blood vessels). Vitamin D helps the body to absorb calcium and phosphorus – the building blocks for strong bones.



A study looking at the effect of vitamin D in recovery from acute episodes of optic neuritis in people with MS found a link between the severity of optic neuritis and vitamin D levels. People with higher levels of vitamin D had less severe episodes of optic neuritis. However, there was no association with high vitamin D levels and a faster recovery from optic neuritis (10).

## Eye Tests

In the UK the NHS recommends people should have their eyes tested approximately every two years. This ensures that your eye health is checked regularly and any issues that require attention can be addressed without delay. Some people may be eligible for free NHS eye and sight tests (11).



**The one thing that kept me sane was using audio books (tapes) from the library. I could put them on, lie in bed and doze or sleep. Particular narrators are very good for lulling you to sleep!**



## Further information

### **MS-UK Choices booklets – MS symptoms and Vitamin D**

[www.ms-uk.org/choicesleaflets](http://www.ms-uk.org/choicesleaflets)

### **The Nystagmus Network**

A website packed with information about nystagmus, including personal experiences.

Call 01427 718093 during normal office hours.

Email [info@nystagmusnet.org](mailto:info@nystagmusnet.org)

[www.nystagmusnet.org](http://www.nystagmusnet.org)

### **RNIB – Royal National Institute of the Blind**

105 Judd Street  
London  
WC1H 9NE

Call 0303 123 9999 - Monday to Friday 8am to 8pm and on Saturdays 9am – 1pm

Email [helpline@rnib.org.uk](mailto:helpline@rnib.org.uk)

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



# About MS-UK

MS-UK is a national charity formed in 1993 supporting anyone affected by multiple sclerosis. Our hope for the future is a world where people affected by MS live healthier and happier lives.

MS-UK has always been at the forefront of promoting choice, of providing people with all the information and support they need to live life as they wish to with multiple sclerosis, whether that be through drugs, complementary therapies, lifestyle changes, a mixture of these or none at all.

We will always respect people's rights to make informed decisions for themselves.

## The MS-UK Helpline

We believe that nobody should face multiple sclerosis alone and our helpline staff are here to support you every step of the way.

Our service is informed by the lived experience of real people living with MS, so we can discuss any treatments and lifestyle choices that are of benefit, whether they are clinically evidenced or not.



## New Pathways

Our bi-monthly magazine, New Pathways, is full of the latest MS news regarding trials, drug development and research as well as competitions, special offers and product reviews. The magazine connects you to thousands of other people living with MS across the country.

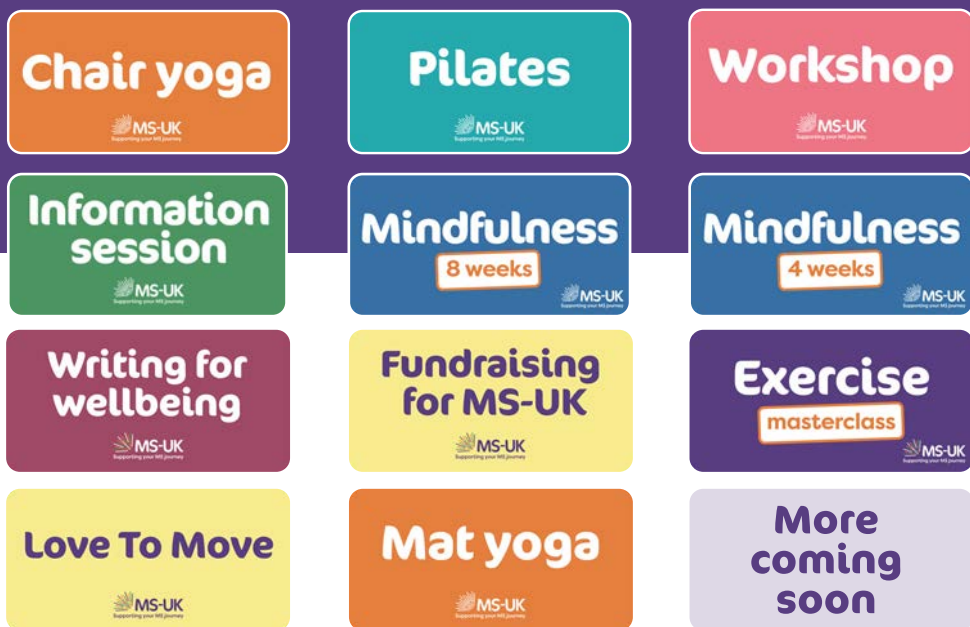
Available in print, audio version, large print and digitally.

# About MS-UK

## Peer Support Service

Our Peer Support Service enables people to connect with others in a safe space and share experiences on topics of interest. Our Peer Pods take place regularly and are all volunteer led. Please visit the website to find out more [www.ms-uk.org/peer-support-service](http://www.ms-uk.org/peer-support-service) or email [peersupport@ms-uk.org](mailto:peersupport@ms-uk.org).





## Online activities

MS-UK offers a variety of online activities to stay active and connected for those affected by MS and manage their symptoms to live happier and healthier lives. Activities include exercise sessions, mindfulness courses, chair yoga classes, information sessions and workshops. Visit our website to explore and find out more.

## E-learning

Do you work with or support someone living with MS and want to increase your understanding and knowledge of this long-term health condition? Professionals at MS-UK have created accredited Learning courses that can help you do this. Visit <https://ms-uk.org/excellence-ms/> to find out more.

## Sources

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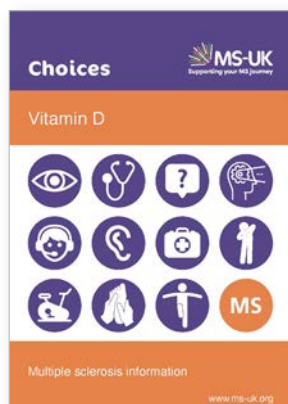
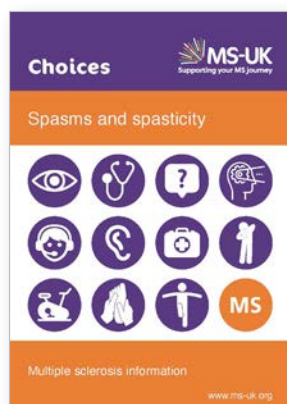
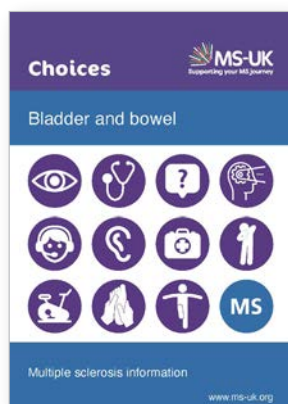


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# Read more Choices booklets

For more information about living well with multiple sclerosis, visit [www.ms-uk.org/choicesleaflets](http://www.ms-uk.org/choicesleaflets) where you can read more and download your free copy of any of our Choices booklets.



# Check out MS-UK's online activities

Live a happier and healthier life with MS



- ✓ Accessible online exercise classes
- ✓ Chair yoga classes
- ✓ Mindfulness courses

- ✓ Interactive workshops
- ✓ Information sessions
- ✓ Peer Support Service

**Don't miss out – sign up for our new online activities today!**

**Visit [www.ms-uk.org](http://www.ms-uk.org) or contact us at [register@ms-uk.org](mailto:register@ms-uk.org)**

 **MS-UK**  
Supporting your MS journey

Registered charity number 1033731

## Stay in touch

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[www.ms-uk.org](http://www.ms-uk.org)

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in [www.linkedin.com/company/ms-uk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ms-uk)

📷 [www.instagram.com/multiplesclerosis\\_uk](https://www.instagram.com/multiplesclerosis_uk)

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