

Understanding Peripheral Vision – Why Bumping Into Things Happens



Peripheral vision helps detect what is happening to the sides while looking straight ahead. It is important for noticing movement, finding objects and obstacles, and moving around safely.

When peripheral vision is reduced, everyday activities can become surprisingly difficult. A person may still have useful central vision but bump into furniture, miss steps or kerbs, or fail to notice someone approaching from the side.

NORMAL FIELD OF VIEW



You can see clearly to the sides as well as ahead.

LOSS OF PERIPHERAL VISION (TUNNEL VISION)



Side vision is lost. You may not see things until you are very close to them.



HOW MIGHT IT FEEL?



Bump into door frames or furniture.



Miss objects placed to the side.



Miss steps or kerbs.



Find busy environments overwhelming.



Need to turn the head more often to see what is around them.



Feel less confident walking, particularly in unfamiliar places.



WHAT CAN CAUSE LOSS OF PERIPHERAL VISION?

Several eye and neurological conditions can affect the visual field.

Glaucoma – the “silent thief of sight”



Glaucoma is one of the most common causes of gradual peripheral visual-field loss. It is often called the “silent thief of sight” because significant damage can occur before a person notices any change in vision.

Glaucoma usually results from damage to the optic nerve. Early changes may be very subtle. A person may continue to see reasonably well straight ahead while gradually losing areas of side vision.



Remember: glaucoma can steal peripheral vision quietly, but early detection and treatment can help protect sight.

Retinitis pigmentosa and other inherited retinal diseases

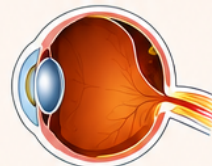


Retinitis pigmentosa (RP) is an inherited retinal condition that often affects peripheral vision first.

Early symptoms may include difficulty seeing in dim light or at night.

As the condition progresses, the visual field can gradually narrow, sometimes producing “tunnel vision”.

Retinal detachment



A retinal detachment can cause a sudden shadow, curtain, or missing area of vision.



This is an eye emergency and requires urgent assessment.

Stroke or other neurological conditions



Damage to areas of the brain involved in processing vision can cause loss of one side of the visual field.

This can happen even when the eyes themselves appear relatively healthy.



WHAT CAN HELP?



Scan the environment – Turn the head from side to side, particularly when moving through unfamiliar areas.



Improve lighting – Good, even lighting can make obstacles easier to detect.



Use contrast – Contrasting colours on steps, door frames, furniture and other important features can make hazards easier to identify.



Keep walkways clear – Removing unnecessary furniture, loose cables and other obstacles can make movement around the home safer.



Take extra care in busy places – Shopping centres, stations and crowded streets can be particularly challenging. Slowing down and scanning from side to side can help.



LOW VISION SUPPORT



Peripheral vision loss cannot always be corrected with ordinary spectacles.

A low vision assessment can identify practical strategies, lighting improvements, mobility support and appropriate visual aids.

Occupational therapists, rehabilitation specialists and mobility instructors can also help develop safer ways of moving around.



AN IMPORTANT WARNING

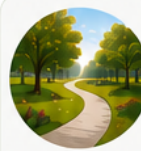


A gradual reduction in peripheral vision should be assessed by an eye-care professional, particularly because conditions such as glaucoma can progress without obvious symptoms.



Sudden loss of peripheral vision is different.

A sudden dark area, curtain, shadow or missing section of the visual field—especially if it develops over minutes or hours—requires urgent medical assessment, as it may indicate a retinal or neurological emergency.



KEY MESSAGE

Peripheral vision is easy to take for granted until it starts to disappear.

Recognising the problem, understanding its cause, and learning practical ways to compensate can improve safety, confidence and independence.

Reduced peripheral vision does not mean giving up everyday activities. With the right support and adaptations, many people can continue to live active and independent lives.

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