

RNIB

supporting blind and
partially sighted people

The benefits of registering

as blind or partially sighted



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About the “Confident living” series

The “Confident living” series of leaflets offers basic information to help people with sight problems get on with their lives.

Other titles in the series include:

Community care

Finding a residential home

Going on holiday

Money for pensioners

On the move

Shopping made easier

Staying in your own home

Each title in the series is free to individuals and is available in print, giant print, audio and braille formats. To order your copy, please contact RNIB’s Helpline on 0303 123 9999 (all calls charged at local rate).

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Please note that the information in this leaflet is for guidance only and is not an authoritative statement of the law.

Introduction

If you are losing or have lost your sight, you might start finding things difficult that you previously took for granted. There is, however, help available to support you in getting your life back together. If you register your sight loss with your local authority, it will be easier to access some of the help and support you need. There are two levels of registration, known as:

- **severely sight impaired/blind** and
- **sight impaired/partially sighted**

You'll be entitled to concessions such as discounts on bus and rail travel, as well as possible reductions in your council tax. You may also be able to claim welfare benefits, including Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance. There is more information about claiming these benefits later in the booklet.

It is important to note, however, that loss of sight in only one eye does not qualify you for registration unless you have poor sight in your other eye.

You can also get help by calling your social services department. Or you can obtain a Low Vision Leaflet (LVL) or a Referral of Vision Impairment (RVI) from your eye hospital or clinic. There is more information on these in Appendix 1.

How do I register?

In order to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted you need to visit an eye specialist, called a consultant ophthalmologist. They will conduct an eye test and complete a Certificate of Vision Impairment (CVI). In Scotland, this is a BP1 form.

In your eye test, the consultant ophthalmologist will measure how good you are at seeing detail (your visual acuity) and how much you can see from the side of your eye when you're looking straight ahead (your field of vision). They use a combination of your visual acuity and your field of vision to judge whether you're eligible to be registered, and at which level.

Your visual acuity is measured by reading down an eye chart while wearing any glasses or contact lenses that you may need. This is known as a Snellen scale (more information in Appendix 2).

Your field of vision is measured by a field of vision test. The consultant may do other tests to check your eye health, such as using drops to dilate your pupils. This could blur your vision for a few hours afterwards. You may want to have someone with you to help you home after the appointment.

Your CVI includes the results from your eye test, as well as information about your circumstances and your preferred format for correspondence.

Results of your eye test

If you have good visual acuity then usually you will have had to have lost a large part of your visual field to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted. If you have all your visual field you will usually have to have a very poor visual acuity to be registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted. There is more detail on the results of your CVI in Appendix 3.

Being registered as severely sight impaired or blind does not necessarily mean you are totally without sight or will lose all your sight in the future.

If your sight is affecting your ability to drive safely, you need to inform DVLA on 0300 790 6806.

If you're unhappy with the outcome of the examination, you can ask your GP to refer you to a second specialist.

What is the register?

Each local authority keeps a register of severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted people living in the area. The register is held by the social services department (social work department in Scotland) or its representatives. It helps your local council provide you with the best services it can. The register is confidential so your details cannot be shared.

You have to register to be able to get the concessions mentioned in this booklet, although you don't need to register just to get information and support from your local authority.

Once you have sent a copy of your CVI to your local social services department, they should contact you within 48 hours. If you choose to be registered straight away then your date of your registration should be the date the consultant signed the certificate.

Alternatively you can take more time to think about. If you are having problems because of your sight you can ask your local social services department for help even if you're not registered. This is because there can be delays between certification and registration.

The benefits of registration

If you're registered **severely sight impaired/blind** you are entitled to the following concessions.

- **Blind person's personal income tax allowance**

This allowance is in addition to the usual personal tax allowances. It can be transferred to your husband, wife or your civil partner, in part or whole if you do not have enough taxable income to use it.

Contact your local tax office or call Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs' priority telephone line on 0845 366 7887 about claiming the allowance. Further information is available at their website hmrc.gov.uk or from the office that deals with your tax affairs.

- **Reduction of 50 per cent on the television licence fee**

This applies if a registered severely sight impaired/blind adult or child lives in the household. Call the TV licence helpline on 0300 790 6071.

- **Car parking concessions: the Blue Badge Scheme**

The Blue Badge Scheme is administered by local authorities and can be used in any vehicle in which you are travelling. Contact your local authority's social services department.

Free postage on items marked “articles for the blind”

These can include books, papers and letters in large print (minimum font size 16pt), braille items, computer disks and CDs which have been prepared for blind or partially sighted people.

You may also be entitled to:

- free permanent loan of radios, cd radio cassette players. Contact your local authority’s social services and ask about the British Wireless for the Blind Fund
- help with telephone installation charges and line rental. Contact your local council’s social services to ask if you qualify.

If you're registered **severely sight impaired/blind** or **sight impaired/partially sighted** you are entitled to the following:

- **Free NHS sight test**

Tell the optician before the sight test. The test is also free for anyone aged 60 or over.

- **Other NHS costs**

If you need "complex lenses" you can get a voucher towards the cost of glasses (check with your optician whether you need complex lenses). If you're unable to leave your home without the help of another person, you may be able to get free medical prescriptions. You can also get help with NHS costs, including vouchers towards the costs of glasses and free NHS sight tests, if you receive income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, guarantee Pension Credit or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. If you have a low income or modest savings, you will need to complete an HC1 form. Call the NHS health costs advice line on 0845 850 1166.

- **Discounted rail travel**

The Disabled Person's Railcard generally gives at least one third off the price of certain rail tickets for the cardholder, and an accompanying adult, if applicable.

Even if you do not have this railcard, you can get certain other discounts on rail travel, including season tickets. However, to qualify you must be travelling with another person and have a document confirming your disability when you buy your ticket.

Call 0845 605 0525 or visit their website at disabledpersons-railcard.co.uk for further details.

- **Local bus schemes**

You will be able to get a bus pass that gives you free concessionary travel throughout the country. Contact your local authority for further details.

- **Exemption from BT Directory Enquiry charges**

Ring 195 and ask for a PIN number. You may still use the free service if BT is not your telephone company.

- **Information in accessible formats**

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) is legislation which aims to prevent discrimination against people with disabilities. It automatically applies to people who are registered as blind or partially sighted.

The DDA covers different sorts of situations: employment, goods, services and facilities, transport, education and premises. For example, the DDA says that companies must make reasonable adjustments. This can mean providing information in accessible formats, such as large print, if requested. If you meet the DDA's definition of a disabled person then the DDA will apply to you. This means it is easier for you to show that DDA applies to you.

You can find more information about the DDA in our factsheets, available on our website or from the Helpline at 0303 123 9999.

- **Leisure concessions**

Concessions are available to people with disabilities, or people receiving certain benefits, for various leisure and recreational activities. For example, a free ticket for a person accompanying you to participating cinemas if you are registered severely sight impaired/blind or you are claiming the Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance; and reduced price entry to museums and exhibitions as well as theatres and concert halls. You can call the venue for details of available concessions or call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 for more information.

- **Council tax disability reduction**

You may get a reduction to your council tax bill if you have a room set aside to meet needs related to your disability. For example, if you need to use and store equipment for your communication needs, such as a CCTV. The reduction is not automatic. Ask your local council tax office for details.

Welfare benefits

People who are registered as severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted are not automatically entitled to any welfare benefits and there's no special benefit or pension for them. We have listed benefits that blind and partially sighted people – subject to age and other circumstances – may be able to claim.

Please call our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 for advice and our detailed factsheets on these benefits. Although we cannot guarantee your entitlement, we recommend that you apply for the appropriate benefit. If you don't claim, you won't get anything!

- **Attendance Allowance**

If you're aged 65 or over you can claim Attendance Allowance (AA). It is for people who require help during the day or night (or both). If you need watching over to avoid getting into danger you can also qualify.

- **Disability Living Allowance**

If you're under 65, you can claim Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This has two components. You may get the care component if you need help or supervision. You can get the mobility component if you need guidance to get about in unfamiliar places.

For an AA or DLA claim form, call the Department for Work and Pensions' Benefit Enquiry Line on 0800 88 22 00.

Please note: AA and DLA are ignored as income for all the benefits listed in this section. An award may make it more likely that you will qualify for other benefits.

● **Carer's Allowance**

If someone, such as your partner, a relative or friend spends time looking after you, they may be entitled to Carer's Allowance, or an increase in other benefits. You can be a carer even if you are blind or partially sighted. The person being cared for must be getting either AA or the middle or highest rate care component of DLA. Call the Carer's Allowance Unit on 0845 608 4321.

Important! Before you or your carer claim Carer's Allowance, contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 to check that you, or the person you are caring for, will not lose money.

- **Employment and Support Allowance**

Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) can be claimed if you are unemployed and have “limited capability for work”. To claim, call Jobcentre Plus on 0800 055 6688. If you’re reclaiming benefits after a period in employment or training you may be able to reclaim your previous benefits instead. Please seek advice if in doubt.

- **Tax Credits**

Tax Credits are income-based benefits that can be paid on top of other income including wages and benefits. Claims are based on gross taxable income for the tax year prior to the year of application. They are administered by Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs.

You may get Working Tax Credit to top-up your wages if you work at least 16 hours a week. It includes a disability element if you are registered severely sight impaired/blind or sight impaired/partially sighted or you get DLA or another qualifying benefit.

Most families should qualify for some Child Tax Credit (CTC). If you have a child who is registered blind or gets Disability Living Allowance, your CTC will include the disabled child element. Ring the Tax Credits Helpline on 0845 300 3900.

- **Pension Credit**

If you are aged 60 or over you can get the guarantee Pension Credit if your weekly income is low enough. If you are aged 65 or over you may get the savings Pension Credit if you have modest retirement income or savings.

Between 6 April 2010 and 5 April 2020, the age from which you may get Pension Credit will change. It will gradually rise in line with the increase in the State Pension age for women from 60 to 65 years.

Contact our Helpline to check if you qualify on 0303 123 9999. To make a claim, call The Pension Service on 0800 99 1234.

- **Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit**

These are income based benefits to help people on a low income with their rent and council tax. You can contact your local council for more information.

- **Exemption from “non-dependants” deductions**

A non-dependant is another adult living in your home (who is not your partner). Some benefits are reduced if you have a non-dependant. No deductions will be applied if you are registered severely sight impaired/blind or get AA or the care component of DLA.

Can I get any other help along the way?

Your local authority has specially trained staff, usually called Rehabilitation Workers or Rehabilitation Officers, who can support you in a range of activities. They might be able to help you get about safely, as well as in your daily life, such as cooking and leisure activities. They can also refer you to other services you might need.

Rehabilitation workers may be part of a special team working with people with a sight or hearing loss or based with a local voluntary society for blind and partially sighted people. Not every local council employs rehabilitation workers but your local authority should be able to “buy in” any service you need, as agreed in your needs assessment.

If you later move to a different area, you should call your new local authority’s social services department to let them know that you are registered. If you’re unsure of the number, contact our Helpline on 0303 123 9999 for information. Your new local authority will then be able to arrange for your registration details to be transferred.

Most local authorities offer a registration card which can help to prove entitlement to certain concessions. A registration card in England should follow the guidelines laid down by the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services. You might find such a card helpful to back up requests for assistance when you're out, particularly if you do not use a white cane or guide dog and your sight problem may not be obvious to other people.

Further information

RNIB Helpline

Our Helpline is your direct line to the support, advice and products you need. We'll help you to find out what's available in your area and beyond, both from RNIB and other organisations.

Whether you want to know more about your eye condition, buy a product from our shop, join our library, find out about possible benefit entitlements, be put in touch with a trained counsellor, or make a general enquiry, we're only a call away.

t: 0303 123 9999

helpline@rnib.org.uk

We're ready to answer your call Monday to Friday 8.45am to 6.00pm and Saturday 9.00am to 4.00pm. Outside these times leave us a message and we'll get back to you as soon as possible.

Calls cost no more than a standard rate call to a 01 or 02 number, and count towards any inclusive minutes in the same way as 01 and 02 calls. The price of calls varies between different providers, including between landline and mobile companies, so check with your provider if you are unsure.

Become a Member of RNIB

Join our community of RNIB Members and make a difference to your life and to the lives of other people with sight loss. Receive regular information through Vision magazine, get involved by attending member events, chat to others through the online forum or participate in telephone book clubs. Call RNIB Membership on 0303 1234 555 or visit rnib.org.uk/membership to join or to find out more.

Appendix 1 – How do I get support before I start the registration process?

Before you even begin the registration process, you can get help from your high street optometrist (optician) or a local hospital eye service:

1. Low Vision Leaflet (LVL)

You can get a Low Vision Leaflet (LVL) from your high street optometrist. It gives details of where you can get advice and information locally and nationally. This leaflet contains a form you can send to social services, telling them about your situation and any difficulties or anxieties you experience because of your sight problem.

2. Referral of Vision Impairment (RVI)

You can ask for a Referral of Vision Impairment (RVI) form at an eye hospital service (even while you're undergoing treatment at the clinic). Clinic staff can fill in this form, with your consent. The form is to tell social services about your situation and how urgently you require help, and ask them for an assessment of your need for support.

If you're already attending an eye hospital or clinic you should discuss certification with your specialist. Or you might prefer to talk it over first with someone else at the eye clinic such as an Eye Clinic Liaison Officer, a hospital social worker or a volunteer from a local society for people with sight problems. You might want someone with you to take note of any information you are given.

If you don't attend an eye clinic, you should ask your GP to refer you to a consultant ophthalmologist.

You can also call our Helpline for advice on 0303 123 9999.

Appendix 2 – The Snellen scale

Visual acuity is measured using the Snellen scale. A Snellen test usually consists of a number of rows of letters which get smaller as you read down the chart.

On the Snellen scale, normal visual acuity is called 6/6, which corresponds to the bottom or second bottom line of the chart. If you can only read the top line of the chart then this would be written as 6/60. This means you can see at 6 metres what someone with standard vision could see from 60 metres away. The figures 6/60 or 3/60 show the result of a Snellen test.

The first number given in the result of a Snellen test is the distance in metres from the chart you sit when you read it. Usually this is a six, for six metres, but would be three if you were to sit three metres closer to the chart.

The second number corresponds to the number of lines that you are able to read on the chart. The biggest letters, on the top line, correspond to 60. As you read down the chart, the numbers that correspond to the lines get smaller, 36, 24, 18, 12, 9 and 6. The bottom line of the chart corresponds to the number 6. Someone with standard vision who can read to the bottom of the chart would have vision of 6/6.

For example, a person with standard vision would be able to read the second line on the chart when 36 metres away. However, if you had a Snellen score of 6/36 you would only be able to read the same line at six metres away. In other words, you need to be much closer to the chart to be able to read it. Generally, the larger the second number, the worse your sight is.

Appendix 3 – Results of your CVI

Generally, to be registered as **severely sight impaired/blind** your sight has to fall into one of the following categories, while wearing any glasses or contact lenses that you may need:

- visual acuity of less than 3/60 with a full visual field
- visual acuity between 3/60 and 6/60 with a severe reduction of field of vision, such as tunnel vision
- visual acuity of 6/60 or above but with a very reduced field of vision, especially if a lot of sight is missing in the lower part of the field.

To be registered as **sight impaired/partially sighted** your sight has to fall into one of the following categories:

- visual acuity of 3/60 to 6/60 with a full field of vision
- visual acuity of up to 6/24 with a moderate reduction of field of vision or with a central part of vision that is cloudy or blurry
- visual acuity of up to 6/18 if a large part of your field of vision, for example a whole half of your vision, is missing, or a lot of your peripheral vision is missing.

RNIB Helpline

0303 123 9999

helpline@rnib.org.uk

**If you, or someone you know, is
living with sight loss, we're here
to help.**

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