



National MS Society Information Sourcebook

www.nationalmssociety.org/sourcebook

Visual Loss

Visual symptoms occur frequently in MS, but rarely result in total sight loss or blindness. Temporary blindness in one eye may occur at the time of an acute exacerbation. An exacerbation—also known as an attack, relapse, or flare—is a sudden worsening of an MS symptom or symptoms, or the appearance of new symptoms, which lasts at least 24 hours and is separated from a previous exacerbation by at least one month.

Temporary blindness is most often due to optic neuritis—an inflammation of the optic nerve. This usually clears in 4 to 12 weeks. Recent studies suggest that recovery may be hastened by treatment with intravenous methylprednisolone, followed by a tapered course of oral corticosteroids.

Other causes of visual impairment in MS are nystagmus or opsoclonus—uncontrollable eye movements resulting in “jumping vision.” The drug clonazepam (Klonopin®) is sometimes useful in treating this symptom. Double vision also occurs commonly in MS. It may remit spontaneously.

Organizations for Visually Impaired Can Offer Help

If vision is impaired, and in the rare cases where total visual loss appears to be permanent, it may be helpful to seek assistance from low vision clinics or one of the service organizations for the visually impaired. These organizations may be able to provide help with physical, occupational, and emotional adjustment to loss of vision. Some national service organizations providing help to people with visual problems are listed below. Others may be available locally.

National Association for Visually Handicapped

22 West 21st Street, 6th Floor
New York, New York 10010
Tel. (212) 889-3141
Web site: www.navh.org

National Federation of the Blind

1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
Tel. (410) 659-9314
Web site: www.nfb.org
Email: nfb@nfb.org

American Foundation for the Blind

11 Penn Plaza, Suite 300
New York, New York 10001

Tel. (212) 502-7600
Tel. 1-800-232-5463
Web site: www.afb.org
Email: elga@afb.org

Lighthouse International
Sol and Lillian Goldman Building
111 E. 59th Street
New York, NY 10022-1202
Tel: 1-800-829-0500; (212) 821-9200
TTY: (212) 821-9713
Web site: www.lighthouse.org

See also...

Sourcebook

- Optic Neuritis
- Symptoms
- Visual Symptoms

Society Web Resources

- Spotlight: MS and Vision
www.nationalmssociety.org/Vision
- Medications Used in MS
www.nationalmssociety.org/Meds

Clinical Bulletin for Healthcare Professionals

- Diagnosis and Management of Vision Problems in MS
www.nationalmssociety.org/ClinicalBulletins

Books

Kalb R. (ed.) *Multiple Sclerosis: The Questions You Have; The Answers You Need* (3rd ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2004.

—Ch. 2 Neurology

Schapiro R. *Managing the Symptoms of Multiple Sclerosis* (4th ed.). New York: Demos Medical Publishing, 2003.

—Ch. 14 Vision

The National Multiple Sclerosis Society is proud to be a source of information about multiple sclerosis. Our comments are based on professional advice, published experience, and expert opinion, but do not represent individual therapeutic recommendations or prescription. For specific information and advice, consult your personal physician.

To contact your chapter, call **1-800-FIGHT-MS** (1-800-344-4867) or visit the National MS Society web site: www.nationalmssociety.org.