

Optical Confederation briefing on sight loss and dementia

Introduction

There are many issues to consider as part of dementia awareness, but one that is often overlooked is sight. All too often it is assumed that someone with dementia will not gain any benefit from sight testing and vision correction simply because they have cognitive impairment and may not work, drive or read. However, good eye health and good vision can play an important role in supporting the well-being of a person living with dementia.

Good vision can greatly increase a person with dementia's sense of independence, allowing them to continue to participate in daily tasks and activities and maintaining a good quality of life. There is a need to raise awareness amongst people with dementia and their carers of the disruptions to vision and eye health that may be concurrent with or arise from dementia. This means emphasising the importance of regular sight tests and eye examinations.

Key points for the debate

- People with dementia as a group are potentially at greater risk of visual impairment than people without dementia.
- The ability of a person to cope with visual impairment is reduced if they also have dementia, and as a result they can experience an even greater impact on their cognitive performance, mobility and daily living activities.
- Visual impairment can mask symptoms of dementia, which means that regular sight testing can be an important screening tool for early diagnosis and treatment of dementia.
- Regular eye care has been shown to help reduce the risk of falls, which is particularly important for elderly people at greater risk of dementia and for those already living with dementia.
- Regular sight tests can also lead to the detection of eye diseases that people with dementia can struggle to communicate about, such as glaucoma, allowing early intervention and treatment which can reduce the risk of avoidable sight loss.