

# Charles Bonnet Syndrome

The following is vital reading for those who know or care for someone with vision loss.

Charles Bonnet syndrome (CBS) is a common condition among people who have lost some or all of their sight, from eye conditions, such as age-related macular degeneration, cataract, glaucoma or diabetic eye disease; in which they see things that aren't really there, known as visual hallucinations.

The main cause of CBS is loss of vision and how your brain reacts to this loss. Current research suggests that, when you are seeing real things around you, the information received from your eyes stops the brain from creating its own pictures. When you lose sight your brain sometimes fills in these gaps by releasing new pictures, patterns or old pictures that it has stored. When this occurs, you experience these images as hallucinations. CBS tends to begin in the weeks and months following a deterioration in your sight.

It can be distressing, but the hallucinations are usually not permanent, typically lasting for a year to eighteen months before becoming a lot less frequent.

It is normal to be worried, confused or frightened when you see things that are not really there. Until you know what's happening, you may be concerned that seeing things is a sign of a mental health problem, or you might think you have Alzheimer's disease.

However, it is important to remember that CBS is caused by sight loss and not by any other health problem.

Many people are frightened to discuss the hallucinations because they are worried that they may be "going mad". It is important that relatives and health care professionals involved with patients who have significant sight loss are aware of this condition and discuss it. This will help to alleviate the fear and isolation experienced by many who experience it.