



Paediatric information-for parents

# Medically unexplained visual symptoms – the eyes and the mind



Children often experience problems with their eyes or vision which can be difficult to explain. Typical problems include blurred vision, tunnel vision, double vision, or seeing coloured lights or shapes.

Frequently, these symptoms occur when children are worried or anxious about something-for example other children at school, a difficult time at home, exam stress, or similar events. Sometimes there might not be a particular reason that you can link to your child's symptoms.

## **How will my child be assessed?**

At Moorfields, young children may be assessed by a range of professionals including nurses, orthoptists (who assess vision and eye movements), optometrists (who carry out tests for glasses) and ophthalmologists (eye doctors).

Sometimes, children who complain of blurred vision actually have normal vision after assessment, which can be reassuring for the child and family to

hear. If the examination is normal, it is very likely there is no serious cause or disease and most children will not need other tests.

## **What other tests might be needed?**

A few children may require specialised tests such as a scan of the back of the eye (OCT), electrodiagnostic tests- which check whether the retina, (the nerve layer at the back of the eye) and the optic nerve (which takes the visual information to the brain), are working normally). Sometimes an MRI scan of your child's eyes and brain might be needed.

If the assessment is normal, a diagnosis of 'medically unexplained visual symptoms' is made. The doctor will explain to you and your child that there is no physical cause for your child's problem with their eyes or vision and that, for unknown reasons, their mind is not processing the visual information as well as it should.



Sometimes the doctor will ask about any worries at school or home.

### **How long will it take for these symptoms to go away?**

Such problems usually get better on their own. This generally happens within a few weeks but sometimes can take a few days. In some children it can take longer for symptoms to go away. Rarely, the problem can persist but, if families feel confident that there is no serious physical problem, then they can provide reassurance to their child, so that they can 'move on' and put their eye problem aside. This is just as one would deal with the occasional unexplained tummy-ache or headache.

### **What if my child develops other (non visual) symptoms?**

Very rarely, children can also develop other symptoms, such as numbness or difficulties with walking. These may require an assessment by a paediatrician (a specialist children's doctor) to make sure that there are no other causes for these problems. If this assessment is also normal, then a diagnosis of 'medically unexplained symptoms' will be made. The management is the same as for the visual symptoms, in that your child will need re-assurance that all is well, and that they can get on with their usual activities.

### **Is there anything else I should be aware of?**

Sometimes children complain of physical symptoms when they are anxious or depressed, or are having difficulties with their learning or attention span. A psychologist or psychiatrist might be helpful in working out if this is an emotional issue for your child's medically unexplained visual symptoms. You may find it useful to discuss this further with your child's eye doctor to assess whether this would be helpful.

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**Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust**  
City Road, London EC1V 2PD  
Phone: 020 7253 3411  
[www.moorfields.nhs.uk](http://www.moorfields.nhs.uk)

**Moorfields Direct telephone helpline**  
Phone: 020 7566 2345  
Monday-Friday, 8.30am-9pm  
Saturday, 9am-5pm  
Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

**Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)**  
Phone: 020 7566 2324/ 020 7566 2325  
Email: [moorfields.pals@nhs.net](mailto:moorfields.pals@nhs.net)  
Moorfields' PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.





## Your right to treatment within 18 weeks

Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further (see above). For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, visit [www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs](http://www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs)

