

## 2.2 Managing Symptoms of PSP: Eye Movement and Vision Problems

*This Help Sheet gives further information about the problems experience by people with Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP for short) in relation to eye movements and vision. It outlines treatments and strategies for managing these problems. The information here is presented as a guide; it is important to discuss all symptoms and management strategies with your neurologist and other health professionals.*

PSP is a rare neurological condition affecting the parts of the brain that control walking, eye movements, balance, speech and swallowing. PSP has a wide range of symptoms, but few people experience them all and symptoms vary from person to person. It is a progressive condition, meaning that the symptoms tend to worsen over time. However the severity and rate of symptom progression varies widely.

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Difficulty controlling the muscles of the eyes is a common symptom of PSP. This problem generally appears later in the condition, on average three to five years after the walking problems. The associated vision problems cannot be corrected with eye glasses.

### **The most common vision problems include:**

- Double vision, tunnel vision or blurred or misty vision due to problems moving the eyes.
- Difficulties in moving or aiming the eyes properly, making reading and driving difficult.
- Inability to maintain eye contact with others, giving the mistaken impression of disinterest or of a memory or thinking problem.
- Difficulties in looking down, causing problems with walking as well as with activities such as cutting food and guiding it to the mouth.



## Treatments for managing common eye and vision problems include:

**Special glasses** with prism lenses. These can help some people who experience difficulty looking down. Unfortunately, because people with PSP also have difficulty directing attention to low objects, these glasses are not always successful.

**An eye-patch** or taping over one lens may occasionally help to reduce double vision problems.

**Artificial tears** should be used to keep the eyes moist. They come as eye drops that can be used during the day. They also come as an ointment or gel which is useful overnight if the eyelids don't fully close.

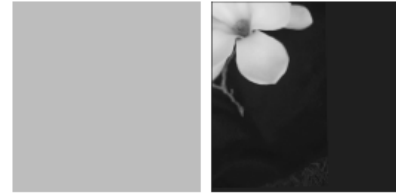
**Eye sprays** are available, which may be sprayed onto closed eyelids as an alternative to using drops.

## Less common eye and vision problems include:

- Problems with eyelid movements, including difficulty opening or closing the eyes. Some people experience involuntary closure of the eyelids or involuntary screwing up of the eyes, known as *blethrospasm*.
- Slower frequency of blinking, which can lead to dry eyes, irritation, infection, and ulceration in extreme cases. Sometimes the eyes water but the tears trickle from the corner instead of washing across the eye, so the centre of the eye remains dry.
- Difficulty tolerating bright light, especially bright sunshine.

## Treatments for managing less common eye and vision problems include:

- **Sunglasses** that wrap around, or tinted lenses that can help with sensitivity to bright light.
- **Botulinum toxin** (Botox ® or Dysport ®) that can be injected into the eyelid to prevent the muscle from contracting, which helps avoid the involuntary closing or screwing up of the eyelids. Botox needs to be repeated every 3 or 4 months. Your neurologist can help to arrange this treatment.



## Other strategies for managing eye and vision problems

Eye and vision problems can also be managed with strategies such as removing low objects, particularly trip hazards such as rugs and low coffee tables. It can also help to place items such as call buzzers, food and drink and the television control within the field of vision. Remember also to take into account the limited direction in which the person with PSP can look and arrange items such as TV, books and pictures accordingly.

An eye specialist, or ophthalmologist, can assist further if eye and vision symptoms are particularly severe.

## Services for people with vision problems

**Vision Australia** provides a diverse range of services for people who have low or no vision and most services are provided free of charge. Specialist staff can assess your vision and provide services based on individual needs. Its library has a wide range of print alternative books, newspapers and magazines available free for loan through postal delivery to members across Australia. For more information, contact the national contact centre of Vision Australia on 1300 84 74 66 or visit [www.visionaustralia.org.au](http://www.visionaustralia.org.au)

**Your local library** will also have a selection of 'talking books' that you can borrow.

For further information about living with PSP, including the full range of PSP Australia Help Sheets, visit: [www.psp-australia.org.au](http://www.psp-australia.org.au)

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*For PSP information and support phone  
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June 2009

