

## What next?

Unless you have other visual problems which require treatment, you will receive a phone appointment after 3 months. This is to determine if the overlay is working and/or if a further appointment in the Orthoptic Department is required. The overlay may help initially because it makes the page look different- if this is the case the effect will probably 'wear off' and you will then naturally discontinue using it. However, if it is found to be making a really positive impact on reading and symptoms and you are continuing to use it then it may be worthwhile considering tinted glasses.

## Colorimetry

Coloured lenses in glasses are more convenient than overlays as they can be used not only for reading but also for writing and board work. If you already wear glasses the prescription will need to be incorporated into the tinted lenses so have an up to date sight test first. An instrument called the 'Intuitive Colorimeter' is used by a Specialist Optometrist to determine the precise colour of tint required and therefore may not be the same colour as your overlay.

## Specialist Optometrists

Colorimetry is not available on the NHS in your region. A fee will be charged for the Colorimetry test, frame and the tint. Charges vary considerably and you are strongly recommended to check with your local opticians before making an appointment.

**Contact the Orthoptic Department on:  
01225 824614**

Royal United Hospitals Bath  
NHS Foundation Trust  
Combe Park, Bath BA1 3NG  
01225 428331 [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital.

Email: [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656 or 826319

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## Visual Stress

### Specific Learning Difficulties

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# What is visual stress?

Lines of text are rather like a striped pattern. When some people look at black and white stripes of specific width and spacing it causes visual distortions and illusions. These distortions are due to hyper-excitability in the part of the brain known as the visual cortex. It is thought that when some people try to read the 'stripy' effect of the lines of print, it causes similar symptoms affecting their ability to read the text.

This is known as Visual Stress or Meares-Irlen Syndrome. Visual Stress is NOT Dyslexia but is more common amongst dyslexic individuals.

## What are the symptoms of Visual Stress?

- Headaches, eyestrain
- Blurring of print
- Words moving & appearing to jump out of page
- Colours in the text
- Glare, page too bright
- Losing place, skipping words or lines
- Poor understanding of text being read

## How do we know when Visual Stress is present?

The Orthoptist will assess your symptoms by asking some specific questions whilst you look at a piece of text.

If there are positive indications for Visual Stress, an assessment using coloured overlays will be carried out. This involves comparing the appearance of a piece of text through different colours. The aim is to see if a particular colour or shade of colour relieves the symptoms of Visual Stress.

The Orthoptist will then assess whether reading through the chosen colour improves the speed and accuracy of reading.

**Tips:** Change the background colour of computer screens to a similar colour. Use coloured paper for writing tasks and print work onto coloured paper.

## How can we relieve the symptoms of Visual Stress when reading?

An increase in reading speed of at least 5% indicates that using a coloured overlay is likely to have a beneficial effect on reading. It is believed to work by reducing the hyper-excitability in the brain thereby eliminating the illusions and distortions. The Orthoptist will provide you with an overlay in the chosen colour.

## How to use your overlay?

When you read, place the overlay over the page. Choose the matt or shiny side, whichever you prefer. However you may need to position the text or lighting to avoid reflections from the surface especially if using it with the shiny side facing upwards.

You can use the overlay as much as you like. The purpose of the overlay is to find out if it helps to reduce your symptoms and enable you read more easily. We recommend a 3 month trial period.

