

Cortical visual impairment

What is cortical visual impairment?

Cortical visual impairment (CVI) may also be called cortical blindness or cerebral blindness/vision impairment.

CVI is commonly associated with widespread neurological damage in the brain. Therefore, vision loss is predominantly due to reduced visual perceptual abnormalities caused by impaired function of various areas of the brain involved in processing visual information.

This means that a person with CVI may be able to look at an object or person but not be able to understand what they are seeing. This condition may cause temporary or permanent visual impairment.

The degree of neurological impairment depends upon the time of onset and the location and intensity of the damage.

What causes CVI?

There are multiple factors that contribute to the development of CVI however the primary causes of CVI include lack of or insufficient oxygen to the brain (anoxia, hypoxia, ischaemia, and asphyxia), developmental brain anomalies, head injury, hydrocephalus, and infections of the central nervous system such as encephalitis and meningitis.

What are the common characteristics of children with CVI?

Certain characteristics are common to children with CVI. A significant characteristic is fluctuation in visual functioning.

That is, the child may be more visually aware on one day or in one hour than the next. This often coincides with fluctuations in level of attention.

Another characteristic is that children with CVI may appear to look at an object of interest and then look away from it when reaching for it. Children with CVI often perform better visually when activities have minimal visual clutter and external distractions such as noise, are eliminated.

Gazing at light sources is reported and seems to occur mostly among children with very low vision.

Does vision ever improve?

Improvement in vision is dependent on the onset, cause and extent of impairment. Temporary CVI, which seems to occur mostly after meningitis or minor head injuries, may begin to recover a few days or months after the illness. Recovery may not always be complete and may be partial.

What can I do to maximise the visual performance of a child with CVI?

Visual activities are performed better by the child if they contain simple, constant and predictable information. The child may benefit by complementing their visual input with something that they can feel or hear.

The child will learn more if the activities are enjoyable and they are having fun. The child will also be more responsive if they are positioned comfortably and are stable.

A significant amount of energy is required to process visual information. The child might tire easily when performing visual tasks so, working in short periods can help overcome fatigue.

How can Vision Australia help?

Vision Australia provides support and services to people of all ages and stages of life who are blind or have vision loss.

We work with people to achieve what's important to them such as studying, finding or retaining employment, leading an active social life or continuing to do the things they love.

With the support of our professional teams, people who are blind or have low vision can develop their skills and make use of technology and equipment that will enable them to live independently.

Contact Vision Australia

Call 1300 84 74 66
Email info@visionaustralia.org
Website visionaustralia.org
Locations VIC | ACT | NSW | QLD | WA