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The invisible glass

Hemianopia – when half the field of vision disappears after a stroke

Scene from the CaregIVR virtual home: a glass sits at the left edge of the table. A person with left-sided hemianopia may not notice it and knock it over.

WHAT IS HEMIANOPIA?

It is the loss of vision in the same half of the visual field in both eyes. The eyes themselves work normally; it is the visual pathway in the brain that is damaged. A stroke in the right hemisphere usually removes the left side of the surroundings from view; a stroke in the left hemisphere removes the right side. The person is not always aware of the deficit.

What should you look out for?

- bumping into objects and doorframes on one side
- eating from only half of the plate
- being startled when someone approaches from the affected side
- losing their place when reading
- not finding things that are right beside them

How can you help?

- At first, approach and speak from the side the person can see.
- Place the glass, medication and telephone within the person's field of vision, always in the same place.
- Encourage the person to turn their head towards the affected side. This compensatory strategy should be taught by a therapist.
- Mark the edges of the table, plate and steps with contrasting tape; ensure good lighting.
- Remove obstacles from the path on the affected side and do not move furniture without warning.
- When reading, a clear vertical line in the margin on the affected side can help.

IMPORTANT !!!

Hemianopia must be distinguished from hemispatial neglect, in which the person can see but does not pay attention to one side of space; both disorders may occur together. A visual field defect requires assessment by an ophthalmologist and a neurologist. A doctor authorised to conduct driver examinations decides whether the person may return to driving. **If vision suddenly gets worse or new neurological symptoms appear, call 112.**

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