

# Irlen® Syndrome

## What is Irlen Syndrome?

Irlen Syndrome - also known as visual stress, scotopic sensitivity syndrome or Meares-Irlen syndrome – affects the way the brain interprets the visual information that is sent through the eyes, causing visual perception problems. It can make reading effectively and efficiently very difficult and may also affect the way people perceive their environment. People with Irlen Syndrome have to constantly make adaptations or compensate for their eye problems, which involves exerting extra energy and effort. They may squint, rub their eyes, appear wide-eyed or blink a lot.

## How common is Irlen Syndrome?

It is thought that up to 20% of us are affected to some degree by visual stress. Some experts believe that nearly half of people with dyslexia and a third of those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may also have Irlen Syndrome. It is also believed that visual stress may be a factor in the sensory overload or distortion that some people with autism experience.



# What challenges and difficulties can people with Irlen Syndrome experience?

People with Irlen Syndrome can experience difficulties in the following areas:

## Reading difficulties

- Poor comprehension and misreading words
- Problems tracking from line to line
- Difficulty reading in bright light
- Easily losing their place or skipping words or lines when reading text
- Difficulty with words moving around the page or appearing distorted or blurred
- Slow or hesitant reading speed
- Tiring easily when reading
- Avoiding reading altogether
- Difficulty reading text on a white background or where there is high contrast.

## Writing and typing

- Trouble copy typing
- Using unequal spacing or letter size
- Difficulty writing in a straight line
- Inconsistent spelling
- Making basic mathematics errors
- Misaligning numbers in columns.

## Physical symptoms

- Sensitivity to glare from bright lights
- Fatigue
- Headaches or nausea
- Fidgeting or restlessness
- Eye strain, particularly from PC or screen use, with eyes becoming painful or watery
- Mood changes – increased anxiety or irritability.

## Other effects

- Poor concentration and inattention
- Ineffective use of time
- Lack of motivation
- Inefficiency
- Being clumsy or accident-prone and bumping into things
- Difficulty judging distance
- Poor hand-eye coordination.



## Helpful tips for supporting someone with Irlen Syndrome at work

The most common and most effective way to help improve visual processing is the use of coloured overlays (sheets of transparent coloured plastic) and tinted lenses (or spectral filters).

Coloured overlays are most effective if the person's difficulties are mainly with reading. Overlays work by making print appear clearer and more stable and can improve reading speed, accuracy and comprehension, as well as helping people to track and keep their place when reading. For many people, overlays should reduce strain, tiredness and headaches and help to improve concentration.



Spectral filters, worn as glasses or contact lenses, can also help with light sensitivity, depth perception, anxiety, headaches, migraines and attention difficulties.



### Other helpful solutions include:

- Using coloured paper for printing and writing on
- Using a ruler to keep track of text when reading and writing
- Using larger, clearer font
- Changing background colours on computer screens
- Avoiding fluorescent or over-bright lights
- Allowing frequent breaks or changes of task
- Avoiding bright colours or busy patterns in the work environment and on printed or reading materials.

**Remember, the individual is the expert in their condition – if in doubt, check with them!**