

## Ophthalmology

# Non-arteritic ischaemic optic neuropathy (NAION)

Information for patients, relatives and carers

## Introduction

This leaflet will give you information about **non-arteritic ischaemic optic neuropathy (NAION)**. We hope it answers some of the questions you or those who care for you have. If you have any questions about the information below, please contact us. Use the details at the end of this leaflet.

## What is NAION?

Non-arteritic ischaemic optic neuropathy (NAION) is a condition that affects the optic nerve. This is the eye nerve that sends visual information from the eye to the brain. It happens when the blood flow to this nerve is reduced. This can lead to sudden loss of vision without pain, usually in one eye.

## What are the warning signs and symptoms?

If you have NAION, you may suddenly notice that your vision is blurry or reduced. You might notice loss of part of your visual field, for example the upper or lower half of vision). You could also find it difficult to see in dim light, and have changes in colour vision. Many people realise their vision has changed when they wake in the morning, and this usually does not come with any pain.

## Risk factors for NAION

The exact cause of NAION is not always clear. It is not caused by inflammation or infection. Some things that increase the risk of developing NAION include:

- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- high cholesterol
- smoking
- sleep apnoea (breathing that stops for short periods when sleeping)
- heart or blood vessel disease

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- having a small or crowded optic nerve structure (when the eye nerve is smaller than normal or squeezed, which can affect vision)

## NAION diagnosis

We diagnose NAION based on your symptoms, eye examination, and tests such as visual field testing. We also need to do a scan of the eye nerve called optical coherence tomography (OCT). We might do blood tests to rule out other reasons for your vision problems.

## Is NAION the same as arteritic optic neuropathy?

No, these two conditions are different. Arteritic optic neuropathy is caused by giant cell arteritis, which is a medical emergency that requires immediate urgent treatment. Your doctor will make sure you have the correct diagnosis.

## What treatment is available and will my vision get better?

At the moment, there is no treatment that brings back the vision loss caused by NAION. We focus on managing blood pressure, and controlling diabetes and cholesterol levels. We would also support you to stop smoking and refer you for treatment of sleep apnoea if you need this.

Some patients might notice some improvement in their vision over the weeks or months. Other patients might have little or no improvement.

Once NAION settles, the vision in that eye does not usually get worse.

## Can NAION affect the other eye?

There is a small chance that NAION will affect your other eye in the future. We will support you to manage the risk factors for NAION, which can help lower the chance.

## When should I seek urgent medical help?

You should get urgent medical help by ringing 999 if you:

- suddenly lose vision
- notice new missing areas in your vision
- experience symptoms such as headache, jaw pain, or tenderness on your head
- feel generally unwell

## Living with NAION

If vision loss makes it hard to do daily activities, low vision services can provide help. You can find out more about low vision services here: [www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/navigating-sight-loss/eye-care-services-and-roles/low-vision-and-low-vision-services/](http://www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/navigating-sight-loss/eye-care-services-and-roles/low-vision-and-low-vision-services/)

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Using visual aids can help you stay independent. You can find out more here:  
[www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/assistive-aids-and-technology/](http://www.rnib.org.uk/living-with-sight-loss/assistive-aids-and-technology/)

You should talk to your eye doctor about whether you can still drive safely.

## Who can I contact for more information?

- emergency department at Western Eye Hospital – 020 3312 3245
- outpatients at Western Eye Hospital – 020 3312 3236
- Alex Cross ward day care unit – 020 3312 3218/ 9614
- outpatients at Charing Cross Hospital - 020 3311 1109/ 1233/ 0137

## How do I give feedback?

We want to hear your **suggestions** or **comments**. Your feedback helps us provide the best service. You can always speak to a member of staff.

You can also contact the **patient advice and liaison service (PALS)** on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 to 16.00, Monday to Friday excluding bank holidays) or email at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net). The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or questions and they can help solve problems.

You can make a complaint by ringing **020 3312 1337 / 1349** or emailing [tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:tr.Complaints@nhs.net). The address is Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

## Other ways to read this leaflet

Please email us at [imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net) if you need this leaflet in a different format. This could be large print, Easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in a different language.

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