



When Visual Hallucinations are normal.

Vivid, silent, visual hallucinations can occur when a person's sight is diminished or lost from any one of the eye diseases, cancer, stroke, accident, diabetes or another condition which damages the optic nerve. It does not affect everyone with low vision and, as yet, it is not possible to predict who will develop the condition. It is called **Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS)**.

The hallucinations appear in all sorts of forms, from simple lines and dots, coloured blobs and geometrical patterns to more complex hallucinations of faces (sometimes distorted or gargoyle-like), people (real-sized, tiny, young or old) often in period costume - or whole scenes.

It is important to remember that these hallucinations use only one of the five senses – sight. If any of the others – hearing, tasting, smelling or touching – is involved, then it is not **CBS**.

Dr. Dominic ffytche – the world's lead researcher into **CBS** – explains what happens in the brain to cause the visual disturbances. *“From the moment we open our eyes, the nerve cells in the retina send a constant stream of impulses along the visual pathways, which are passed to the visual parts of the brain. If the retina is damaged, or even if you blindfold your eyes, this stream of impulses reduces. Paradoxically, the response of the brain is not to reduce but, rather, increase the cells firing – and it is this increase that causes visual hallucinations. What you hallucinate depends on where the increase is located. If it is in the brain area specialised for colour, then you hallucinate a colour; if in the brain area specialised for faces, then you see a face – and so on.”*

Certain types of medication can help but they are not suitable for everyone. Coping strategies can be useful. Details of these - including Dr ffytche's specially created eye exercise - can be found on the website – www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk

CBS can be alarming and distressing but it should not be confused with a mental condition of any kind. Too often, the nature of the symptoms prevents people from confiding in family, friends or the GP, but sharing your experience can be of great comfort. Offer this leaflet to explain **CBS**.

Not all doctors are aware of CBS, so please take this leaflet with you.

Tel: 020 7391 3299

(calls answered for Esme's Umbrella by the Eye Health Team at the RNIB)