

Visual Impairment



Visual Impairment (VI) refers to a significant loss of vision that cannot be corrected by medication, surgery, or standard optical lenses such as spectacles. Its severity ranges from moderate impairment to blindness, categorised based on the person's visual acuity:

- **Moderate VI:** Visual Acuity from 6/18 to better than 6/60
- **Severe VI:** Visual Acuity from 6/60 to better than 3/60
- **Blindness:** Visual Acuity of 3/60 or worse

Individuals with VI may have the following conditions:

- ✓ Avoid or not maintain eye contact during conversations
- ✓ Bump into objects unexpectedly, which can lead to potential injuries
- ✓ Feel reluctance to move around, particularly in unfamiliar environment
- ✓ Find it difficult in describing light, distance, volume, or color of objects
- ✓ Read or write very close to materials
- ✓ Tilt their heads to see objects more clearly

Diagnosis and Treatment

In Hong Kong, VI is diagnosed by an ophthalmologist or an optometrist. Early intervention and appropriate treatment can significantly improve daily functioning and quality of life for individuals with VI.

Treatment options may include surgical intervention for conditions such as cataract, laser therapy for retinal issues, and the use of corrective lenses and optical aids to maximize residual vision. Implementing a multi-sensory approach, providing clear verbal instructions, and encouraging active exploration can assist individuals with VI develop essential concepts, and foster independence in self-care and mobility.

Supporting Students with Visual Impairment

University life can present unique challenges for individuals with VI, particularly in social communications, academic performance, and emotion well-being. Helpful tips may include:

Social Communication

- ✓ Allow students to hold your arm just above the elbow when guiding them, instead of pushing them forward by grabbing their arm
- ✓ Call gently the student's name to get their attention before beginning a face-to-face conversation
- ✓ Ask if the student needs guidance, and respect their choice if they prefer not to accept help
- ✓ Use specific descriptions and directions based on landmarks (e.g. "to your right" or "behind you"), instead of sight-dependent terms like "here" or "there"

Academic Support

- ✓ Allow extended time in examinations (with professional's recommendation)
- ✓ Allow the use of assistive technologies during classes and examinations
- ✓ Distribute reading lists and course materials early to give students ample time to convert them into accessible formats
- ✓ Offer assistance from laboratory and/or library staff as needed
- ✓ Provide access to lecture recordings to facilitate revision/learning after classes
- ✓ Provide information in electronic formats that are accessible to students
- ✓ Verbally describe written content, PowerPoint slides, blackboard information, charts, graphs, and diagrams to enhance understanding



Psychological Support

- ✓ Refer to psychological counseling service for students' mental health and adversity coping capability

It is essential to recognize that individuals with VI have unique strengths and capacity. Fostering an inclusive and supportive environment can empower students to pursue their goals with confidence and resources they need.

References

Child Assessment Services, Department of Health, HKSAR. (2021, Mar 31). Visual Impairment. https://www.dhcas.gov.hk/en/visual_impairment.html

World Health Organization. (2024, Feb 2). Blindness and Vision Impairment. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/blindness-and-visual-impairment>