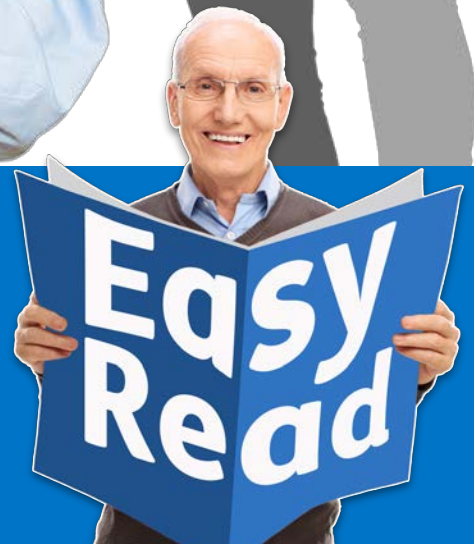


Other people tell me I am seeing things



MindEd
for Families

online advice and support you can trust

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Hallucinations



Some people see or hear things that aren't actually there.

This is called a **hallucination**.



They may not be able to tell the difference between hallucinations and real things.



It can be extremely frightening and unpleasant.



This might be because:

- The hallucination is threatening or frightening.
- People worry they might be starting a mental health condition.



Hallucinations are not as bad as they seem.

For most older people they are not a sign that you are getting something serious.



There are lots of things that can be done to help you.

Why people get hallucinations

Poor vision

The most common reason for older people to see things is because of an eye condition.



When someone has visual hallucinations caused by eye disease it is called Charles Bonnet Syndrome.



Hallucinations may start around the time your vision gets worse.



The hallucinations may:

- Be simple colours and patterns or faces, people and objects.



- Be people or things you know, but usually are completely new. The people may be wearing strange costumes.



People with Charles Bonnet Syndrome often see the hallucinations in more detail than real people and objects.



Poor hearing

People who suffer from hearing loss might hear old tunes and singing choirs.



If you have both poor vision and poor hearing you can get both images and sound.



Grief

You will suffer **grief** when someone dies.



There are many different ways that **grief** affects people - including great sadness.



You may see or hear the deceased person briefly.

For example, you might:

- See the deceased person in their usual chair.



- Mistake them for a stranger passing by.



These experiences are a normal part of coming to terms with a loss.



Parkinson's disease

Parkinson's disease is a disease of the parts of the body called the nervous system.



People often suffer from shaking, moving slowly and difficulty with walking.



People who are in the early stage of Parkinson's disease may also:

- Feel someone is next to them.



- See a person or animal pass by in the corner of their eye.



In later stages they may see people or animals and hear voices.

See the easy read information about **Parkinson's** for more information.

Dementia

Dementia is a word that is used to explain a few different diseases of the brain.



People who suffer from hallucinations sometimes worry that they are starting with dementia. This is unlikely.



People with dementia usually only get hallucinations in the later stages of the disease.

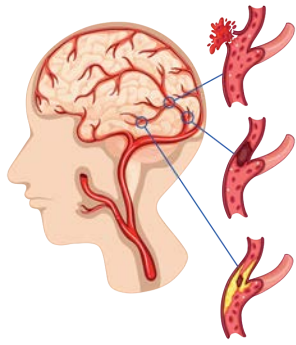


Mental Illness

People who suffer from hallucinations sometimes worry that they are starting with mental illness. This is unlikely.



When an older person is starting a mental illness they may get hallucinations - but this is more likely to be voices talking to you.



Stroke

Stroke is when part of your brain stops working because of a blockage in the blood supply.



If the parts of your brain to do with seeing are affected you may get hallucinations.



Being unwell

Hallucinations can be made worse by:

- Having an infection
- Poor health
- Stress



Medication

Some medications can cause hallucinations or make them worse if you have them already.

The medications that commonly lead to hallucinations are:



- Strong pain killers



- Medications for:
 - Bladder problems



- Dizziness

When to get help



Hallucinations in older people are not unusual.



But you should tell someone in case there is anything that can be done.



You should get help if your hallucinations are frightening or making you upset.

Where to go for help

Your GP



Your GP can help with your hallucinations and talk to you about whether to carry out tests, or to see a specialist.

Your specialist clinic



If you are going to a clinic for eye disease, hearing loss, mental health or memory problems, you should let them know about your hallucinations.

They will be able to give you specialist advice.

Treatment



The type of treatment will depend on what is causing the hallucinations.



Self help

If you have poor vision you can do things yourself to stop hallucinations when they occur.

These include:

- A simple eye exercise



1. Look left and right every second 15 times without moving your head.

2. Rest a few seconds and then do it again.



3. It may take several repeats to work. Don't carry on for longer than 3 minutes.



- **Lighting**

Changing the light around you, making them brighter or dimmer.



- **Do something different**

For example if you've been sitting down, get up and make a cup of tea.



Talking Treatment

Counselling or talking treatment can be useful.

It might be aimed at treating the hallucinations themselves or reducing general stress or low mood.



Medication

There are no special medications for hallucinations but some medicines for epilepsy or dementia have been shown to help.

Going to see a specialist



You might be asked to see:

- An eye doctor.
- A Parkinson's disease specialist.
- A Geriatrician - a doctor who specialises in older people.



- An **old age psychiatrist**. This is a doctor specialising in mental health problems in older people.



Old age psychiatrists are experts in hallucinations and their possible causes.



Being asked to see an **old age psychiatrist** doesn't mean you have a mental illness or dementia.

For more information

For more information about Charles Bonnet Syndrome please go to:



- Esme's Umbrella:
www.charlesbonnetsyndrome.uk



- NHS choices:
www.nhs.uk



- A video about Charles Bonnet Syndrome



- The Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB):
www.rnib.org.uk

This resource is part of the MindEd online learning site. For more information from MindEd please contact:-



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