

ARE YOUR EYES PLAYING TRICKS ON YOU?

Sometimes a person with reduced vision will be tricked by their brain and believe they are seeing things that are not there. You may have heard about a Phantom Limb sensation, which is when a person who has lost an arm or leg still feels sensations in the missing body part. That can happen with sight too!

The sense of vision includes the eyes and parts of the brain, which may continue to be active even if your sight is reduced, but in a very different way. Some people report seeing animals, children, colorful patterns and so on that are not there, but which appear to be real. Many are afraid to speak of this for fear of being labeled as odd or perhaps even delusional.

This condition is known in medicine as *Charles Bonnet Syndrome*. The brain will continue to create images in the person's mind even after actual sight is reduced. It differs from other hallucinations in that the images do not attempt to influence or communication with the person; they just come and go. The visions can come on suddenly and appear solid, but they are an image created by the brain and do not exist in the outside world. A person with this problem might be walking outside and suddenly see walls, gaps in the ground, or images, and move to get away from a problem that is not really there. We have even heard cases when the person seeing the vision thinks someone has entered their home and calls the police, but no one is really there.

Charles Bonnet Syndrome most commonly occurs in older people with significant eye disease. You should tell your doctors if this is happening to you. While there is no standard treatment for *Charles Bonnet Syndrome*, it helps the person and their family members to know they are not losing their minds. In many cases, the hallucinations diminish and go away over time.

In summary, there is a known medical condition wherein people with vision impairments experience visual hallucinations. We at **Helen Keller Services for the Blind** want you to know more about your eyes and sight loss. For over 100 years, our organization has worked with children and adults who have sight loss and we have the knowledge and experience to help.

For more information, contact us at:

email: info@helenkeller.org

website: www.helenkeller.org

New York City: 718-522-2122

Nassau County: 516-485-1234

Suffolk County: 631-424-0022

