

ORTHOPTISTS: IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH FOR ALL

Orthoptists are Eye & Vision Specialists and experts in the assessment of visual function, particularly in children and those with communication difficulties. They have in depth knowledge of how the eyes move and work together and understand why and how neurological impairments affect the way we see.

An orthoptist assesses, diagnoses, treats and monitors a variety of eye disorders, working autonomously, as part of the eye care and in multi professional health, educational or social care teams. Orthoptists treat children with conditions such as amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (misalignment of the eyes). Treatments may include glasses, an eye patch, eye exercises or referral for surgery.

As well as children, orthoptists also manage adults with a range of eye movement disorders. Along with treatment, they offer specialist advice to help patients and carers understand the condition, ways to adapt to any visual difficulties and optimise the quality of life. Most orthoptists work in hospital or community settings, in rehabilitation services, as well as special schools, mainstream schools, child development centres and may offer home visits.

Orthoptists are key players in promoting healthy life styles and preventing ill health:

- **At the start of life:** by supporting vulnerable newborn infants and young children with developmental delay; leading school vision screening so that eye sight problems are identified when treatable and before they effect learning. Therefore helping to maximise educational attainment and prevent permanent sight loss.

- **In Adulthood** - being the first point of diagnosis for many neurological diseases such as Multiple Sclerosis and signposting patients to emotional as well as medical support. Taking the opportunity to promote healthy life styles; e.g. ensuring patients with thyroid eye disease stop smoking.
- **In older age** - teaching ways to overcome the visual consequences of Stroke and providing services in accessible locations to enable patients to return to independence and improved quality of life.

Emma finally sees an Orthoptist

I was diagnosed double vision, had prisms fitted (allowing single vision for the first time in 16 months).

I can walk short distances and cross roads with confidence - a considerable difference as I had been virtually housebound.

Losing my vision has been the most debilitating. Double vision made simple household tasks impossible -pouring a kettle of boiling water resulted in a scalded right hand. Crowded, busy areas became danger zones with too many hazards - I stayed indoors, where I was safe.

In the last 16 months I fell over so many times because I had not seen kerbs, raised paving slabs and stairs.

I know that I have the support of your orthoptic department in my rehabilitation, which after 16 months, means I no longer need to live in isolation.

Thank you for giving me my life back.

The logo for the British and Irish Orthoptic Society (BIOS). It features the letters 'BIOS' in a bold, purple, sans-serif font. The letter 'O' is a solid purple circle. Above the letters, there is a stylized graphic of an eye, with a purple iris and a grey sclera, partially obscured by a grey wave-like shape that suggests a lens or light rays.

British and Irish Orthoptic Society

www.orthoptics.org.uk