

# The Partially Sighted Society

SEEING THE WAY FORWARD, TOGETHER

# NEWSLETTER



## April 2026 Edition

[partsight.org.uk](http://partsight.org.uk)



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# A Very Warm Welcome

As the days grow longer, there is something quietly hopeful about spring — a sense of renewal that feels fitting for this edition. At The Partially Sighted Society, that hope is reflected in the work we do, the people we support, and the stories we share. Sight loss is not a single story. It is a collection of lived experiences, challenges, and possibilities — and this issue captures many of them.

Fiona Scott-Barrett's guest article reminds us that visual impairment is often invisible — and that small moments of awareness can make a profound difference.

This month, we launch our SEND Writing Assessment Toolkit, designed to ensure pupils with visual impairment are assessed fairly, using tools that support their abilities rather than hinder them. Every child deserves the chance to show what they can do.

Independence and access run throughout this issue — from the first half of our A–Z of Accessible Walks to guidance on the CEA Card scheme.

We also explore the link between diabetes and eye health, offering clear information to help people protect their vision.

Advances in research — from retinal implants to stem cell therapies — are opening doors that once seemed firmly closed. Progress is accelerating.

Our impact extends beyond the UK, with surplus equipment supporting communities in Tanzania. Closer to home, Walk, Talk and Tuck In continues to bring people together, building confidence and connection.

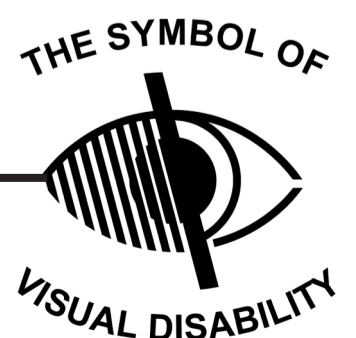
Finally, Simon Mahoney's exploration of recovery — and his FAIRER framework — challenges us to consider not just the physical dimensions of sight loss, but the mindset and support needed to move forward.

None of this is possible without you. Thank you for being part of a community that believes sight loss should never mean loss of opportunity, dignity, or independence.

Anita

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**Anita Plant, CEO**



# Waving at Fire Engines: Navigating the Fog of Visual Impairment



**By Fiona Scott-Barrett**

**Fiona Scott-Barrett is a novelist and former English language teacher who has lived and worked across Italy, Indonesia, Germany and Greece. Her debut novel *The Exit Facility* (2021) was runner-up in the Society of Authors' ADCI Literary Prize in 2023, and like Fiona herself, its heroine lives with a rare eye condition causing gradual loss of central vision. Here, she writes candidly and with characteristic wit about navigating the world with Best's disease.**

Close friends and family were aware, but in its early stages partial sightedness is an invisible disability — if you see a stranger squinting at electronic bus tracker boards or peering closely at packets in the supermarket, you might well assume they had simply forgotten their glasses.

My vision took a dip after moving back to Scotland in 2013 and I had to adopt new strategies. When meeting new people, I would explain that I was visually impaired and that, while we might be having a whale of a time in the pub together, the chances were

that if I saw them in the street the next day I would probably walk straight past them — my facial recognition is poor. If we planned to meet again, I told them I would hover in the doorway and wait for them to wave wildly or come and collar me.

At bus stops and in supermarkets I took to accosting strangers: "Excuse me, I'm partially sighted — could you tell me what the next bus is?" or "does this jar contain black olives or stewed prunes?" This worked well until my opener at the bus stop was answered with: "Sorry, I'm completely blind and

my app's not working. I was about to ask you the same question." We ganged up on a new arrival together, who decided we were running a scam and ran away.

Following a more recent deterioration, I cast pride and reticence aside. I now leave the house adorned with high-vis badges and armbands declaring my status as visually impaired — safer at night, and a useful reminder to acquaintances that I am not a stuck-up so-and-so, deliberately ignoring them. On a few recent occasions, alert members of the public have even read my signs, anticipated my difficulties, and offered help unprompted.



One thing I find surprising is how few fully sighted people ask me about being partially sighted. Those who do usually ask why I don't have a white cane. I do own one — not the long kind with the ping-pong ball on the end, since Best's disease does not greatly affect peripheral vision and I can navigate familiar environments reasonably well. Mine is a slim, foldable

"symbol cane", 70cm long. In the city it acts as a magic wand with bus drivers: wave it at an approaching bus and the driver stops, opens the door, and calls out the route number. Dismiss the bus without it and you are likely to be sworn at. I have inadvertently tried the same technique on furniture removal vans, tourist coaches, and off-duty fire engines. None has ever stopped.

There are many conditions that cause visual impairment, each manifesting differently. Macular conditions like Best's disease affect central vision, making reading, recognising faces, threading needles, and clipping fingernails difficult or impossible. If you want a rough idea of how I see, smear Vaseline lightly over your glasses, then add a dome-shaped blob about two centimetres wide to the centre of each lens. Try to read a tin's ingredient list, find a small dropped object such as a coin or peanut, then identify people in a small group photograph. If that felt challenging — with smears, foggy patches, or pixelations — you now have some idea. (Caveat: do NOT attempt stairs or cross a road while trying this.)

The best questions to ask any partially sighted person are simple: "Do you need help?" and "How can I help?" Some well-intentioned people have grabbed me by the elbow and marched me up the street when all I wanted was to proceed at my own pace. Please let me get on with things — when nobody is around, I manage perfectly well on my own. If I want help, I will ask for it. But if danger looms and my central vision loss is about to lead to a cut finger, a singed fringe, or your best china in pieces — please, feel free to step in.

# 'Every Child Deserves the Chance to Show What They Can Do'

The Partially Sighted Society has launched a specialist Writing Assessment Toolkit designed to give pupils with visual impairment fair, consistent access to the tools they need to demonstrate their abilities — and to support educators in assessing them effectively.



For many visually impaired pupils, a writing assessment can become a barrier rather than a fair measure of ability. Faint pen lines, low-contrast rulers and crowded print can turn a simple task into unnecessary strain. Instead of showing what they know, pupils are forced to work around tools not designed for them.

The Society has worked for decades to close this gap. This month it launches its SEND Writing Assessment Toolkit, available through its specialist School Shop.

“Every child deserves the chance to show what they can do. For too long, pupils with a visual impairment have had to work twice as hard simply because the tools around them were not designed for them. We want to change that.”

— Anita Plant, Chief Executive

Developed in-house, the toolkit meets a consistent need among QTVIs, SENCOs and specialist educators for accessible assessment tools. Priced at £20, it is designed for immediate use in schools and specialist settings.

**The right tools make a difference**  
Inside the kit are high-contrast and bold-line pens, large-print rulers and protractors, the PSS Writing Assessment Book, and a catalogue of VI stationery and daily living aids.

Small changes in equipment can improve access and independence. A clearer pen line improves readability for pupil and teacher. A large-print protractor supports independent geometry work.

Anita Plant continues: “Independence is at the heart of everything we do. When a visually impaired young person can complete a task without help, it is a key confidence milestone.”

Ultimately, the toolkit is about equity. When every pupil has access to the same quality of tools, assessment results reflect genuine ability — and every child gets the recognition they deserve.

The SEND Writing Assessment Toolkit is available now for £20 via our School Shop, at: [schoolzone.partsight.org.uk](http://schoolzone.partsight.org.uk).

# The PSS A to L of Accessible Walks

PSS is travelling across the UK to discover walks that combine clear orientation, firm and reliable surfaces, and genuine enjoyment for people living with sight loss. Each route has been chosen with accessibility in mind, highlighting places where confident, independent walking is possible. We hope you enjoy exploring them with us.

## A - Avon (Bristol)

### Bristol Harbourside



The gentle lap of water against moored vessels becomes your guide along Bristol's harbourside, offering a constant, reassuring audio thread that makes independent navigation feel natural and confident.

Wide, step-free paths with firm paving underfoot keep the route predictable and unhurried, while dropped kerbs and audible crossings smooth each road junction without interruption. Regularly spaced benches serve double duty — as rest stops and as familiar landmarks to anchor your position along the waterfront. Best of all, the route bends itself to you: walk a short loop and turn back, or follow the harbour's curve further, letting your comfort and curiosity set the pace.

## B - Berkshire

### The Long Walk, Windsor



Stretching south from Windsor Castle through the quiet grandeur of Windsor Great Park, The Long Walk earns its reputation as one of England's most navigationally intuitive routes. The path commits to a single, unwavering line — castle behind you, the distant Copper Horse statue ahead — so orientation is instinctive and reassuring throughout. Beneath your feet, broad compacted gravel offers firm, even footing, while the towering avenue of elms frames the route on both sides, their canopy rustling overhead and their trunks a tactile presence at the path's edge. The generous width means the walk never feels crowded or constrained.

### Travel Tip: Face the Horse

Begin at the castle end and walk south toward the Copper Horse statue — with the wind typically at your back and the ground falling gently away, it's the most rewarding direction to travel.

## C - Cambridgeshire

### The River Cam, Cambridge



Threading through Cambridge's historic core, the riverside path follows the Cam's quiet current — a reliable guide that keeps orientation effortless and the pace naturally unhurried. Chapel bells, warm ancient stonework, and the scent of cut grass drifting from lawns to the water's edge create a rich, layered backdrop. Paving is level, with reassuring railings along the water and accessible cafés nearby. Best experienced early on a weekday.

## D - Derbyshire

### Chatsworth Gardens



Few gardens engage the senses quite like Chatsworth — fountains heard long before they're seen, sculpted hedges brushing the path's edge, floral scents shifting and deepening between well-maintained gravel beds. Architecture looms at intervals, its cool stone a contrast to open lawns catching the Derbyshire breeze. Smooth, clearly defined paths make this a landscape designed to be felt as much as seen.

## E - East Sussex

### Eastbourne Promenade



Flat, traffic-free, and generously wide, Eastbourne's seafront promenade is about as close to effortless walking as the English coast offers — smooth paving underfoot, gentle gradients, and nothing to interrupt your rhythm but the sea itself. Waves provide a steady, reassuring orientation to your south, while plentiful benches appear at regular intervals, each one an invitation to pause, breathe, and listen. Simple pleasures, delivered without compromise.

## F - Fife

### West Sands Beach, St Andrews



Two miles of open shoreline, the North Sea rolling in from the east, and a sky that shifts from pearl-grey to burning gold — West Sands has a cinematic scale that hits you before you've taken ten steps. A firm promenade and grassy dune paths offer confident, level walking, while seasonally available beach wheelchairs extend access to the sand itself.

## G - Gloucestershire

### Chipping Campden, Cotswolds



Tucked into the northern Cotswolds, Chipping Campden rewards unhurried exploration — its gentle circular walks, including Dovers Hill and the Miles Without Stiles route, offer smooth, predictable terrain where panoramic views give way to fragrant cottage gardens and a constant, soothing chorus of birdsong, wind, and distant church bells. The town itself is a sensory pleasure: warm honey-stone walls radiate heat on sunny afternoons, the smell of freshly baked goods drifts from independent cafés, and locals are genuinely forthcoming with directions and conversation. Navigation through the historic high street is simple, with a largely linear layout and firm, even surfaces underfoot. Come at your own pace, pause often, and let Campden reveal itself gradually — this is a place that rewards those who linger.

#### Travel Tip: Time Your Bells

Chipping Campden's St James' Church rings a full peal on Sunday mornings — plan your walk to coincide and let the cascading bells roll across the valley as your soundtrack.

## H - Hampshire

### South Downs Way



Wide, well-maintained paths make the South Downs Way ideal for visually impaired hikers, significantly reducing tripping risks throughout. The trail rewards with layered sensation: the sharp coconut scent of gorse, chalky texture underfoot, and a soundscape of wind, waves, and ascending skylarks. The bold high-contrast silhouettes of the Seven Sisters provide striking visual landmarks, making every step safe, engaging, and memorable.

## I - Isle of Wight

### Shanklin to Sandown Coast Walk



This gentle, promenade-style coastal path is ideal for walkers of all abilities. Smooth, firm paving and gentle gradients make navigation easy, while thoughtfully placed seating and café stops provide perfect opportunities to pause and take in the stunning views of the Solent. A relaxing and scenic route.

## J - Jersey

### St Aubin's Bay Promenade



Stretching along Jersey's south coast, this wide, flat promenade offers one of the island's most rewarding accessible walks, with a smooth tarmac surface underfoot and generous width that makes navigation confident and unhurried.

Regular benches provide welcome rest points along the route, while tactile wayfinding features and clear signage support independent exploration. The sea is your constant companion to the south — listen for the soft collapse of waves on the shoreline and, at low tide, the wet-sand scent of the retreating Channel.

A prevailing south-westerly breeze carries the faint brine of the bay, and on calm days the sun warms the seawall to your left as you head east toward St Helier.

#### Travel Tip: Listen to the Land

Tide times dramatically alter the soundscape here — check the daily times and visit at low tide for the full sensory theatre of exposed rock pools, calling gulls, and the soft hiss of retreating surf.

## K - Kent

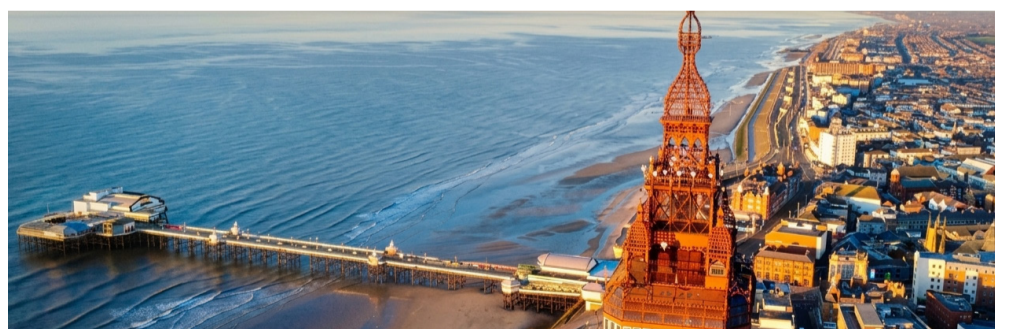
### Kent Rye Harbour Nature Reserve



Boardwalks and compacted gravel trails guide you through one of the south-east's most atmospheric coastal landscapes, where the crunch of shingle underfoot gives way to the soft thud of wood planking as the path threads through reed beds and open marsh. The reserve rewards patient, unhurried visitors — listen for the percussive rattle of reed warblers, the haunting cry of curlews overhead, and the distant drag of shingle on the shoreline. Tactile signage and well-positioned observation hides offer natural pause points, each one framing a fresh wave of sound and scent from the surrounding wetland habitats.

## L - Lancashire

### Blackpool Promenade



Smooth, level surfaces and seafront railings make this one of Britain's most effortlessly accessible coastal walks, stretching as far as you care to wander. Salt air, fairground music, and the constant crash of the Irish Sea to your west deliver sensation at full volume throughout.

# Did You Know You Could Bring a Companion to the Cinema for Free?



Going to the cinema is one of life's great pleasures—and if you have a visual impairment or another disability, you should never have to miss out. Thanks to the CEA Card, a UK-wide accessibility scheme, you can take a companion along with you completely free of charge when you purchase your own ticket. It's a straightforward, well-recognised system designed to make cinema-going more accessible, enjoyable, and cost-effective for disabled people across the UK.

## **What is the CEA card?**

The CEA Card (Cinema Exhibitors' Association Card) is an official national scheme that entitles disabled cinema-goers (aged 5 years and older) to one free ticket for a carer or companion.

There's no need to explain your situation at every visit, simply present

your card at the box office or input your card number when booking online at most major chains, and your companion's ticket will be provided at no cost. The card is valid for one year and can be renewed annually for a small fee of £6.50.

## **Where is it accepted?**

The CEA Card is recognised at approximately 90% of cinemas in the UK. This includes all the major chains, such as:

- Odeon
- Cineworld
- Vue
- Showcase

Many independent and local cinemas also participate. While it is always worth checking with a local venue before your first visit, the card is

widely accepted without question nationwide.

### Who can apply?

The CEA Card is available to those who meet specific eligibility criteria, including:

- Recipients of disability-related benefits: Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Disability Living Allowance (DLA), Attendance Allowance (AA), or the Armed Forces Independence Payment (AFIP).
- Residents in Scotland receiving Adult or Child Disability Payments.
- People registered as Sight Impaired or Severely Sight Impaired

### Why it matters

At PSS, we believe that sight loss should never be a barrier to enjoying the things you love. The CEA Card provides a practical solution that:

- Saves money. Removes the extra cost for the companion supporting you.
- Removes awkward conversations. Your card acts as a universally respected proof of eligibility.
- Supports confidence. You can attend the cinema knowing your support needs are covered.
- Upholds your rights. While cinemas have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments, this card makes that process seamless and dignified.

### How to apply

Applying is simple and can be done entirely online. Visit the official website to check your eligibility and complete the short application form. Your card will arrive by post, ready to use.

Get your CEA card today by visiting: [www.ceacard.co.uk/apply](http://www.ceacard.co.uk/apply)

## Product of the Month: PSS Awareness Beanie



**Product Code: BEA001**  
**Price: £12.00 incl. VAT**  
**(£10.00 excl. VAT)**

A simple, effective way to let others know you have a visual impairment. Made from soft, high-quality knit, this awareness beanie helps those around you recognise your needs at a glance — whether you're navigating busy streets, public transport, or unfamiliar environments. Comfortably stretchy with a one-size-fits-all design, it's suitable for most adult head sizes.

# When Blood Sugar Affects Your Sight: What Diabetes Means for Your Eyes



**Many of the people we see at our Low Vision Clinic are living with diabetes or have recently been told they are pre-diabetic. But what does that mean — and why does it matter so much for your eyes?**

At the Partially Sighted Society, we think everyone deserves a clear explanation, not just a leaflet. So, here is what we know about blood sugar, how it works in the body, and why keeping it under control is one of the most important things you can do for your vision.

## **How blood sugar works**

Every time we eat carbohydrates — bread, pasta, fruit, rice — our bodies break them down into glucose, which enters the bloodstream. Normally, the pancreas responds by releasing

insulin, a hormone that acts like a key, unlocking cells so glucose can enter and be used for energy.

In type 1 diabetes, the pancreas produces little or no insulin at all, so glucose cannot enter cells without insulin treatment. In type 2 diabetes and pre-diabetes, the pancreas still makes insulin, but the body's cells have stopped responding to it properly — a state known as insulin resistance. The result is the same either way: glucose lingers in the bloodstream for longer than it should, and blood sugar rises.

## **How do I know if I'm diabetic?**

Type 2 diabetes can develop slowly and quietly, with few obvious signs in the early stages. When symptoms do appear, they often include unusual thirst or hunger, needing to urinate

frequently, unexplained fatigue, blurred vision, or cuts and infections that are slow to heal.

The most reliable way to find out is through a blood test. Your GP may use a fasting glucose test, an oral glucose tolerance test, or — most commonly — an HbA1c test.

### **Understanding your HbA1c: the 'sticky buckets' test**

The HbA1c test tells your doctor what your average blood sugar has been over roughly the past two to three months.

It works by measuring how much glucose has attached itself to the haemoglobin in your red blood cells — a process called glycation. Because red blood cells live for around 12 weeks, the test captures a reliable picture of longer-term glucose control, not just how you were doing last Tuesday.

Think of it this way: your red blood cells are like small buckets circulating through your bloodstream. The more glucose is floating around, the more of it sticks to those buckets. The HbA1c test measures how sticky they have become.

The table below shows the thresholds recognised by NICE: 48 mmol/mol or above indicates probable diabetes, while 42–47 mmol/mol signals increased risk. If your result falls in the pre-diabetic range, your GP may refer you to the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme, a free lifestyle support service that has been shown to help people reduce their risk of progressing to type 2 diabetes.

### **What does high blood sugar actually do to your eyes?**

The effects on vision happen in two distinct ways — one short-term and reversible, the other far more serious. In the short term, when blood sugar rises sharply, glucose enters the lens of the eye and water follows via a process called osmosis.

When people with diabetes experience prolonged periods of high blood sugar, fluid can accumulate in the lens inside the eye that controls focusing. This causes the lens to swell slightly and change shape, bending light incorrectly so that it no longer focuses cleanly on the retina. The result is blurry or shifting vision that may come and go. When blood sugar returns to normal levels, the lens settles back

**In the UK, results are given in millimoles per mole (mmol/mol)**

<b>Result</b>	<b>What it means</b>
<b>Below 42 mmol/mol</b>	<b>Normal</b> Healthy blood sugar
<b>42–47 mmol/mol</b>	<b>Pre-diabetic</b> Higher risk of developing type 2 diabetes
<b>48 mmol/mol or above</b>	<b>Diabetic</b> Blood sugar has been consistently elevated

and vision often clears. Over the longer term, persistently high blood sugar causes something far more damaging. The damage to your eyes starts when the sugar in your blood causes changes to the tiny blood vessels that go to your retina — the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye.

These changes make it harder for blood to flow, leading to blocked vessels that leak fluid or bleed. This is diabetic retinopathy, and it is one of the leading causes of sight loss in working-age adults in the UK.

In advanced stages, the eye attempts to grow new blood vessels to compensate. These new vessels don't develop correctly and can leak or bleed easily. In severe cases, this can lead to macular oedema, retinal detachment, and serious, permanent vision loss.

### **Why the eye is so important as a window to your health**

The eye holds a unique position in medicine. It is the only organ in the body where the tiny blood vessels of the circulatory system can be observed directly, without surgery or invasive procedures. This means that during a routine eye examination, a clinician can see damage that would otherwise be invisible.

The HbA1c diagnostic threshold was chosen in part because it is the point at which the risk of retinopathy — a complication that may be present even before a formal diagnosis of diabetes — begins to increase. In other words, if blood vessels are being damaged in the eye, there is a strong chance the same process is occurring in the kidneys, heart, and other organs. Your eyes are not just windows on the world; they are

windows on your wider health. This is why regular eye examinations matter so much — not only to protect your sight, but as part of a broader picture of health monitoring.

### **What you can do**

Managing blood sugar is the single most effective way to protect your eyes and reduce the risk of complications.

That means:

- Eating balanced meals with foods that release glucose slowly (wholegrains, vegetables, pulses)
- Staying physically active where possible
- Following any medication or treatment plan prescribed by your healthcare team
- Attending your annual diabetic eye screening appointment — it is free on the NHS and could save your sight.

If you have concerns about your blood sugar, your vision, or both, speak to your GP. And if you already have some degree of sight loss, our Low Vision Clinic is here to help. You do not have to manage alone.

The Partially Sighted Society runs a Low Vision Assessment Service offering specialist support and advice. To find out more, visit [partsight.org.uk](https://partsight.org.uk) or scan the QR code below.

**All clinical information has been verified against Diabetes UK, NICE NG28, and the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme guidance.**

**Scan for more information**



# From Doncaster to the foothills of Kilimanjaro: PSS surplus equipment finds a new purpose across Tanzania



The Partially Sighted Society exists to ensure people with sight loss have access to the tools and support they need — a principle it applies beyond Doncaster whenever possible. This spring, surplus equipment and stationery are being sent to Tanzania to support those who need them most.

The shipment includes around 560 exercise books, along with magnifying spectacles, desk and page magnifiers, speaking clocks, handheld and hands-free magnifiers — some fitted with lights that can make a crucial difference to a child's ability to read. One damaged item was responsibly recycled.

Initial parcels will go to Ahia at Murgwanza Primary School's Special Unit in the Kagera Region, and to Ignas, who supports people with albinism — a condition linked not only to sight loss but, in Tanzania, to ongoing persecution and violence.

Further deliveries will reach schools and centres across the Dodoma Region, including Pomerini Primary, Canon Andrea Mwaka School, Spring Hill School, and DCT facilities supporting both students and adults with special needs. Additional materials will also be shared among educators working with children with mixed disabilities.

The final destination is the Voice School in the Kilimanjaro Region, which will distribute supplies with its partner, Patandi Special Needs School. It is a fitting conclusion: a practical act of solidarity that reflects PSS's belief that visual impairment is not just a medical issue, but one of access, inclusion and dignity, and that unused resources should be put to meaningful use.

Follow us on social media for more updates on our international impact @partsight.

# Reasons to Be Hopeful: The Latest Breakthroughs in Sight Loss Research

The world of vision science is moving faster than ever. Here's what's giving researchers real cause for optimism.

## A Tiny Chip That's Changing Everything

Perhaps the most talked-about development in recent months is the PRIMA retinal implant — a wireless microchip, smaller than a fingernail, that sits beneath the retina and works in tandem with a specially designed pair of glasses. The glasses capture images and project them in real time via infrared light to the chip in the eye, effectively bypassing the damaged cells that cause central vision loss in age-related macular degeneration (AMD).

The results from a major clinical trial, published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* in late 2025, were remarkable. Around 84% of participants were able to read letters, numbers and words — through an eye that had previously lost its sight entirely. 27 out of 32 participants had regained the ability to read within a year of receiving the device. One patient in the UK was reported to be reading the pages of a regular book — something previously thought impossible with a prosthetic device. Crucially, the design allows patients to use their natural peripheral vision alongside the prosthetic central vision, helping with both orientation and navigation.

## Stem Cells: Regrowing What Was Lost

In parallel, stem cell research is producing results that would have

seemed like science fiction just a decade ago. Scientists at The University of Southern California are launching a new trial testing whether stem cells can replace damaged retinal cells and potentially restore vision in people with dry macular degeneration. The implant involved is thinner than a strand of hair and is designed to hold lab-grown cells in exactly the right position once placed in the eye.

Meanwhile, separate research presented in 2025 showed even more striking early signs. A cell therapy called Eyecyte-RPE led to an average gain of around 15 letters of visual acuity in patients within just four to six months — and early retinal scans hinted at actual disease reversal, with tissue regenerating in areas traditionally considered permanently lost.

## New Hope for Inherited Sight Conditions

For those living with retinitis pigmentosa — a devastating inherited condition that frequently leads to blindness in adulthood — there is also encouraging news. A cell therapy approach by *jCyte* injects retinal progenitor cells into the eye, where they release protective factors that rescue and reinvigorate dying photoreceptors, regardless of the underlying genetic cause.

This is significant because gene therapies currently exist for less than

1% of patients, given that the condition is linked to mutations across more than 80 different genes. An approach that works across all variants is a potential game-changer.

### **AI: The Unsung Hero**

Artificial intelligence is quietly revolutionising how eye disease is detected and managed. AI-powered imaging tools are being developed that could detect diseases years before symptoms appear — meaning conditions like glaucoma, which can steal sight silently, might be caught and treated far earlier than is currently possible. Researchers are also working on AI tools that combine eye images, pressure readings, and individual

risk factors to make specialist-level diagnosis available to far more people.

### **Looking Ahead**

The pace of progress is genuinely unprecedented. From bionic implants to regenerative therapies to AI diagnostics, the field of vision science has rarely felt so full of possibility. None of these breakthroughs happen without years of research, clinical trials, and — crucially — the support of communities like ours.

We'll continue to keep you updated as these developments move closer to everyday clinical use. Because for many of our members, these aren't just research stories. They're reasons to hope.

## **Walk, Talk and Tuck In Returns to PSS for the Warmer Months**



As the warmer weather arrives, we're thrilled to announce that Walk, Talk and Tuck In is back! This much-loved activity sees participants enjoy a leisurely stroll around the beautiful Town Fields in Doncaster, at a relaxed and fully accessible pace that everyone can enjoy.

Afterwards, the group heads back to the PSS Sight Centre for packed

lunches — the perfect chance to refuel and keep the conversation flowing. It's a fun and friendly way to meet new people and make the most of the season.

All abilities are catered for, so whether you're a familiar face or joining us for the first time, you'll be made to feel welcome. Grab your comfy shoes and come join us!



# Culinary Corner

# Eating with All Five Senses — Why Losing Sight Might Just Make You a Better Cook

There's a quiet secret that chefs have known for centuries: the best cooking was never really about sight. It's about the hiss of onions hitting a hot pan, the resistance of a carrot under a knife, the moment a kitchen fills with the smell of something becoming wonderful. Sight is useful, certainly — but it is perhaps the most overrated sense we bring to the table.

For those of us with partial sight, that reframing isn't just comforting. It's genuinely true.

## **The Myth of the Visual Cook**

We live in an era where food performs. Social media has turned eating into spectacle — golden yolks, geometric toast, herbs arranged under ring lights. It's a vision-obsessed food culture, and frankly, it's exhausting even for fully sighted people. Stepping away isn't a loss. It's a liberation.

When you stop cooking for the camera, you start cooking for the mouth.

Seasoning becomes bolder. Textures more deliberate. You find yourself pressing a thumb into a peach to test ripeness rather than judging its colour — which, as any good greengrocer will tell you, is the correct way anyway.

## **What Your Other Senses Already Know**

Experienced cooks know sound is one of the most reliable kitchen tools. A gentle sizzle means vegetables are sweating properly. A furious spit means the heat is too high. Silence from a pan that should be active means it needs attention. Listen, and the food will tell you what it needs.

Smell works the same way. Garlic signals when it's ready to move on — that sharp, almost sweet shift before bitterness. Bread tells you it's done before any timer does. Caramel has a scent at the perfect moment no thermometer can quite capture.

Touch — often underused — tells you if pastry is overworked, dough has proved enough, or fish will flake cleanly. Professional bakers rely on it almost entirely. You're in good company.

## **A Different Kind of Kitchen Confidence**

Practical adjustments matter, of course. Consistent organisation — everything with a home it returns to — means less searching and more cooking. Contrasting chopping boards and good focused lighting help, as do talking scales and thermometers, which free your attention for what really matters.

But the bigger shift is philosophical. The sight-reliant cook is at the mercy of appearances. The cook who tastes constantly, listens, smells, presses and feels is reading the food itself — not just looking at it.

# Recipe of the Month: Spring Vegetable Bowl with Lemon Tahini



## Serves 2

**Time:** 5 minutes prep, 10–12 minutes roasting, and a few minutes to assemble. 25-30 minutes total.

**Equipment:** A medium saucepan for the grains, a baking tray for roasting, a mixing bowl and whisk (or fork) for the dressing, plus a sharp knife, chopping board, and a colander or sieve for rinsing and draining.

A clean, considered assembly of British summer's best produce, this bowl celebrates the quiet confidence of spring. Sweet green peas, tender asparagus and crisp, peppery radishes are layered over a bed of nourishing grains, then brought together with a bright, lemon-sharp tahini dressing. It's simple food, thoughtfully put together — the kind that feels both fresh and grounding at the same time.

Beyond its flavour and texture, this bowl also delivers real nutritional

benefits. Asparagus and spinach are rich in lutein, a carotenoid associated with supporting eye health, while peas and lemon provide a boost of vitamin C. The quinoa or couscous adds satisfying plant-based protein and slow-release energy, making it a balanced option for lunch or a light evening meal.

Seasonal, colourful and nutritionally purposeful, it's a dish that tastes good and does good. We think it's a fitting centrepiece for April's Culinary Corner.

## Ingredients

- 1 cup quinoa or couscous
- 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and cut into 5cm pieces
- 2 cups baby spinach
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup spring peas, fresh or frozen
- 4 radishes, thinly sliced
- 2 tablespoons pumpkin or sunflower seeds, lightly toasted
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 tablespoons tahini
- 1 lemon, juiced
- 1 teaspoon maple syrup or honey
- 3 tablespoons water, to thin
- 1 pinch salt and black pepper

## Method

**1. Cook the grain:** Rinse 1 cup quinoa or couscous under cold water, then cook in lightly salted water according to packet instructions. Drain well and fluff with a fork.

**2. Roast the vegetables:** Heat the oven to 200°C (180°C fan). Toss 1 bunch asparagus, trimmed and cut into 5cm pieces, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup spring peas with 1 tablespoon olive oil, salt and pepper, then spread in a single layer on a baking tray.

**3. Roast:** Roast for 10–12 minutes, until the asparagus is just tender and the peas have a little colour.

**4. Make the dressing:** Whisk together 2 tablespoons tahini, the juice of 1 lemon, 1 teaspoon maple syrup or honey and 1 pinch salt and black pepper. Add 3 tablespoons water, a tablespoon at a time, until the dressing is smooth and pourable.

**5. Assemble:** Divide 2 cups baby spinach between bowls. Top with the grain, then the roasted vegetables and 4 radishes. Drizzle generously with

dressing and finish with 2 tablespoons pumpkin or sunflower seeds.

**Optional extras:** Serve with sliced avocado or a poached egg, and an extra squeeze of lemon.

### Final Notes:

This bowl is wonderfully flexible, so feel free to adapt it based on what you have available. Tenderstem broccoli or lightly steamed green beans work well in place of asparagus, while feta cheese can be added for a creamy, salty contrast if you're not keeping the dish fully plant-based.

If preparing ahead, keep the dressing separate and add it just before serving to keep the spinach fresh and vibrant. Leftover grains and roasted vegetables can also be stored in the fridge for up to two days, making this a convenient option for a quick lunch the following day.

Above all, this recipe is about celebrating simple seasonal ingredients at their best — fresh flavours, bright colours, and food that nourishes as much as it satisfies.

# Simon Says...



**By Simon Mahoney**

**Simon Mahoney is a man of many lives: a former Royal Marines Young Officer, an accomplished artist, a published author, and a passionate advocate for sight loss awareness. Having navigated the profound challenges of sight loss himself, Simon brings a unique**

**blend of resilience, creativity, and empathy to his writing. This month, he offers a compelling insight into his latest book — exploring what genuine recovery from a sight loss diagnosis looks like, and the very real obstacles that can prevent it.**

## **Chapter Six: Universal and Personal Objectives**

*“Setting objectives is one thing; attaining them is quite another.”*

A note to readers: this is a longer chapter than most — and deliberately so. It forms the very heart of this work, drawing together the extensive research and methods developed across my other writings on sight loss and its wider implications.

Whilst sight loss is a uniquely personal experience, there are aspects common to nearly everyone who lives through it. One of the most significant — and perhaps the most misunderstood — is that the onset of sight loss is, in spite of outward appearances, primarily a psychological event rather than a physical one. I have addressed this at length in earlier chapters. Another common thread is

the matter of objectives: the goals that must be set — and actively pursued — by anyone seeking to return to a full, useful and productive life. And yet, it remains deeply troubling how many people either choose, or are quietly allowed, to become entirely dependent on others, never lifting a finger toward their own recovery. Where that mindset has taken firm hold, any discussion of objectives becomes not just difficult, but effectively meaningless.

It is my firm and unwavering view that people must be identified early in their sight loss journey, so that this dependency mindset can be challenged before it becomes entrenched — and so that objectives can be set that are not only relevant, but genuinely achievable, both personally and collectively.

### **The FAIRER Framework**

These objectives can be summarised:

- Finding information, help and support
- Acceptance of sight loss and general stabilisation
- Internal acceptance and integration of sight loss
- Redefinition of self and renaissance through reskilling
- External acceptance and engagement with life
- Reintegration into society as a whole

Together, these objectives form the acronym **FAIRER** — Finding, Acceptance, Internal acceptance, Redefinition, External acceptance, and Reintegration.

### **The Challenge of Learned Dependency**

Simple as it appears on the surface, the work required to achieve each of these objectives is anything but. One of the most persistent obstacles in any therapeutic endeavour is what I would term learned dependency — a phenomenon that sits at the softer end of a spectrum described by Canadian-American sociologist Erving Goffman in his influential work on institutionalisation. Goffman’s concept refers to the process by which

individuals become utterly detached from society as a result of prolonged separation — as seen, for example, in long-term imprisonment. This enforced separation strips people of their former identity, while simultaneously preventing the formation of a new one, through the compliance and subservience that institutional life demands.

The parallel with sight loss is a striking one. Those who are newly blind can, in effect, become “imprisoned” within their own homes — often at the unwitting behest of well-meaning family members, carers, or a system that prioritises safety over independence. In such an environment, the “rules” are set by others, and the person at the centre of it all gradually loses both the will and the means to define themselves anew.

It is with this in mind that we will examine each of the six aspects of **FAIRER** in turn — and explore how, with the right support and the right attitude, this pattern can be challenged and ultimately broken.

**More in the next edition.**

## **See the Difference You Can Make**

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