

One thing I think we can all admit is that at school we felt it wasn't exactly the easiest time of our lives. Not quite on par with the responsibilities of being a "grown up" but this was a whole new ball game. Whilst at school not only did I have the normal stresses of being a child but this was teamed with trying to do well in class whilst trying to maintain a high level of concentration.

Turns out that maybe the attention I "couldn't maintain" in the classroom was actually not so much due to my behaviour but much more likely due to something else. I just never found it easy to sit and maintain long periods of reading. I found it even more difficult to switch between the interactive board and the paper in front of me. The words on the page would often move or appear to have rivers of spaces running through them. This made it so difficult to track that I eventually lost interest.

I persevered with this for years and had a constant battle to keep up with my peers. Even with all the will in the world maybe my reading was never going to be at the pace I wanted it to be?..**Wrong!**

It turns out these symptoms were very characteristic of what is now termed visual stress. This often presents with a few of the following symptoms:

1. Difficulty maintaining concentration with reading or becoming tired.
2. Words moving about on the page or letters changing shape.
3. Headaches, eye strain or even migraines triggered by flickering lights.
4. Blurred vision or the eyes becoming red or sore.

Now visual stress (also known as Meares Irlen Syndrome) and dyslexia are not exactly the same thing but the first often runs with the latter. Dyslexia is a term used to refer to a number of complex specific learning difficulties that often also

include problems with reading and spelling. So just because I suffered with visual stress does not mean I am dyslexic and vice versa.

The main point here is that there was a **solution!** So next the following 3 things happened:

## The process: Seeing a Senior Optometrist with experience in testing for visual stress.

1. **Full eye examination** to ensure the eyes are healthy and no glasses are required.
2. **Overlay assessment** to understand how coloured overlays may assist in reducing visual stress. (Often an overlay alone is enough to help someone with visual stress).
3. **Colorimetry assessment** to obtain a specific colour of tinted lenses to prescribe in spectacles which will be completely individual and not the same colour as an overlay.

After these 3 things I came out with a very specific set of lenses just for me. These lenses had no prescription in them as that was not my issue. My ability to see was perfect it was the colour of the lenses that was most important to me. What came next was astounding....

My rate of reading increased dramatically, words no longer moved about on the page and my concentration had never been so good. My eyes seemed to relax which reduced the amount of strain and made the whole experience of reading much more pleasurable. I started to understand the words on the page without having to keep re-reading it..... **Result!**

This made such an impact on my life that I honestly believe it paid a large part in furthering my progression to university, obtaining my first class honours degree in Optometry and getting to where I am today.

## Eye Examinations & Visual Stress Testing at iWear Opticians

After my own experiences I have ensured that iWear Tarporley now has all the equipment and expertise necessary to accommodate anyone experiencing any levels of visual stress. I have come to understand that recognising visual stress in some children is exceptionally difficult. However, I thought I would try to put a guide together of the the key things to look out for:

### DO THEY?....

- **Move their book around their desk?**
- **Move closer to or further away from their book?**
- **Fidget a lot, or continuously?**
- **Use their finger as a marker on the page?**
- **Skip words or lines when reading?**
- **Frequently re- read the same line?**
- **Rub their eyes or blink frequently when reading?**
- **Have low self esteem or is frustrated?**
- **Have poor comprehension of reading content?**

If you see any of these symptoms occur in your students, children or anyone else for that matter please do not hesitate to call us. We can start simply by having a chat to see if there is anything we could do to help.

We look forward to seeing or hearing from you and if you have any concerns for further questions please do not hesitate to ring us we are always happy to help.

*"Before I had been tested for visual stress and dispensed with tinted lenses I found it so difficult to concentrate on words. They would move around, become blurred and spaces would appear to run through the page. As a result my reading was poor, full of mistakes and eyes ridden with strain. The prescription tinted glasses were amazing! They made reading a breeze. The words were clear, there were no distractions and I could read fluently, something which I had never done before. All of my energy was not suddenly being put into deciphering individual words, I could read for longer and with less mistakes. I was over the moon, I knew I wasn't stupid. The glasses were life changing and I feel they played a massive part in me subsequently achieving my first class honours degree In Ecology and Physical Geography"*

- David 22 yr old long term dyslexic



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