The information in this leaflet is intended to provide a general outline of how vision and learning can be affected by Retinitis Pigmentosa (RP).

It is important to note that each person may be affected in different ways by their visual impairment and so need to be considered in terms of their individual needs.

**What is Retinitis Pigmentosa?**

Retinitis Pigmentosa is the name given to a diverse group of inherited eye disorders. These eye conditions affect a part of the eye called the retina. Retinitis Pigmentosa causes permanent changes to vision but how quickly this happens and how it changes differs between people. These changes may include difficulty with vision in dim light or the dark (often described as ‘night blindness’) and the loss of your side or peripheral vision (in the worst cases, resulting in ‘tunnel vision’). In the progression of symptoms for Retinitis Pigmentosa, night blindness generally precedes tunnel vision by years or even decades.

**Visual effects of Retinitis Pigmentosa**

The first symptom usually is that it is difficult to see in poor light, such as outdoors at dusk, or in a dimly lit room; (night blindness).

While most people find it takes their eyes about 20 minutes to adapt to dim light, for someone with Retinitis Pigmentosa it will either take much longer or it won't happen at all.

A second symptom is the loss of some of peripheral vision or peripheral visual field. This means that when looking straight ahead it becomes more difficult to see things either to the side, above or below - so called ‘tunnel vision’.

Difficulty seeing in low light and loss of peripheral vision are a sign that the peripheral rod cells are being affected by Retinitis Pigmentosa.

In some Retinitis Pigmentosa related conditions, central vision is lost first because the central cone cells are affected first. In this case it may difficult reading print or carrying out detailed work. In these types of Retinitis Pigmentosa, peripheral vision is affected in the later stages.

**Educational implications**

- If distance vision is reduced, the pupil should be positioned close to the focus of the lesson.
- Extra time may be needed to complete tasks which are visually demanding.
- It may be necessary to negotiate the amount of homework required or the deadlines, because of the difficulties imposed by visual fatigue by the evening.
- The pupil is likely to find copying from the whiteboard difficult.
- Pupils are likely to experience difficulties in areas with poor lighting.
Support, encouragement and some differentiation will be helpful in sporting activities.

**What can you do to help?**

- Ensure that texts, pictures, maps, diagrams and so on are clear, bold and of good contrast.
- The Advisory Teacher for Vision Support will be able to recommend a suitable print size for printed materials.
- Ensure that the student is seated away from the glare of sunlight, either direct or reflected.
- Lighting may need to be improved by use of a desk lamp, but be prepared to use a ‘daylight’ bulb or one with low wattage as the child may also suffer from photophobia (an aversion to bright lights).
- Be aware of any changes in the student’s visual functioning and report these immediately to the parent or carer.
- Be aware that the student may need resources presented immediately in front of them and may not see obstacles or people in their periphery when moving around.

**Further advice and support**

Plymouth Advisory Team for Sensory Support - 01752 305252

Royal National Institute of the Blind - 0845 766 9999

RP Fighting Blindness (The British Retinitis Pigmentosa Society) - 01280 821 334 Helpline - 0845 123 2354

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