



## UNDERSTANDING OPTIC NEURITIS IN MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Many people with multiple sclerosis (MS) experience **optic neuritis**, a dull ache or pain in the eye that can cause vision problems. In MS, inflammation damages the nerve fibres in the central nervous system. Optic neuritis occurs when inflammation affects the optic nerve in the back of the eye, which transmits visual information from the eye to the brain. Optic neuritis is a common initial symptom of MS, but it can occur at any time during the course of your illness.

It's important to determine if eye problems are due to optic neuritis or some other cause. Optic neuritis can be treated to speed recovery and relieve pain, although recovery may not be complete.

### Common symptoms of optic neuritis

- Eye pain, which is usually made worse by eye movements. This can feel like a dull ache behind the eye.
- Reduced vision or loss of vision, which usually affects only 1 eye.
  - Vision loss typically develops over several days, and may take several weeks or months to improve. Loss of vision can sometimes be permanent.
- Loss of part of your field of vision (e.g. letters missing when you read, loss of peripheral or central vision).
- Loss of colour vision. This often affects how you perceive reds and greens. Colours may appear faded or less vibrant.
- Vision disturbances, such as flashing or flickering lights, blurred vision.
- Symptoms typically persist for several days, weeks or months.

### Eye symptoms that are less likely to be optic neuritis

- Symptoms affecting both eyes
- Itchy, watery eyes, redness
- Symptoms that develop after an injury (e.g. from contact lenses), irritation (e.g. detergent in the eye, sun exposure), or trauma (e.g. a blow to the eye)

### If you are having eye symptoms...

- 1 Schedule an appointment with your optometrist or ophthalmologist for an eye exam. The doctor will determine if the problem is due to optic neuritis or some other cause.
- 2 Contact your MS clinic nurse if you think you have optic neuritis. It's also important to contact your MS nurse if you are having vision problems while taking Gilenya (fingolimod).