

Web-based therapies help thousands of stroke survivors

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(Medical Xpress)—Thousands of stroke survivors with visual problems could improve their sight from the comfort of their own home using two new web-based therapies.

The online therapies, developed by UCL and funded by the Stroke Association, are designed to help stroke survivors with visual problems perform [everyday tasks](#) like reading the newspaper and identifying individual objects.

One in five stroke survivors are left with partial or total loss of vision to one side following a stroke (known as hemianopia), which can severely affect their [quality of life](#). The two websites, [Read-Right](#) and [Eye-Search](#) are the first web-based [rehabilitation techniques](#) to be introduced in the UK and could mark the beginning of a new online era for [stroke rehabilitation](#).

Patients with hemianopia find reading difficult as they are unable to see the full page. Some patients abandon reading altogether, and others are unable to return to their jobs as they cannot read quickly enough.

The website [Read-Right](#), which has been trialled by 194 stroke survivors to date, helps them improve their reading by encouraging them to read text as it scrolls across a screen. It is thought that this retrains the brain to perform more efficient scanning [eye movements](#) which can then be transferred to the reading of normal, static text.

Many people with [hemianopia](#) also find it incredibly difficult to find specific objects, particularly in a busy scene. For example, picking up a mobile phone from a range of objects on a table and dialling a number can be very frustrating for some people. The website [Eye-Search](#) helps stroke survivors to find objects through a series of [online games](#) that retrain eye movements.

Tim Hobbs from London had a stroke in November last year at the age of 40 which resulted in the loss of his right visual field. Before his stroke Tim had worked at Sky Sports as the deputy editor for the Sky Sports website for 12 years.

Tim says: "Following my stroke I lost half of my vision to the right. As a result I frequently bump into people as I walk down the street, I can't drive and watching football on TV is very hard. However, my biggest challenge has been reading.

"Reading and writing is a fundamental part of my job, so when I found I had lost some of my sight I was incredibly worried I wouldn't be able to return to journalism.

"I was introduced to Read-Right and it has helped me enormously – I can now read much faster and I was recently able to return to work."

Tim also worked alongside UCL to develop Eye-Search and he is now using this website to help him better distinguish between objects and gain more holistic sight.

Dr Clare Walton, Research Communication Officer from the Stroke Association comments; "Websites like Read-Right and Eye-Search have proven to be incredibly effective in helping stroke survivors who struggle with visual problems after their stroke. The programmes can help with everyday tasks which many of us take for granted like reading

a shopping list or identifying an item of clothing from your wardrobe.

"Many [stroke survivors](#) have told us how the websites have helped them to regain some of their independence; we're delighted to have funded the projects."

Dr Alex Leff, Lead Researcher for the project at UCL Brain Repair & Rehabilitation, says: "We have shown that proven behavioural therapies for visual disorders can be translated to the internet where patients can run them for themselves. I think that this is a good way to open up access to proven behavioural therapies for many other disorders caused by stroke or [brain](#) injury."

Provided by University College London

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