

Irlen Syndrome

Irlen Syndrome is a problem of visual perception that affects the form in which the brain interprets the messages it receives, be it printed text or environmental. It limits the ability of millions of people to read efficiently or at all, and those that have this problem can also demonstrate environmental distortions and challenges in situations such as spatial perception, night blindness, sensitivity to light and problems of auditory and verbal processing, amongst others.

Helen Irlen, an educational psychologist of Long Beach California discovered Irlen Syndrome whilst working on a federal project to find out why some adults continued to experience reading problems even after long therapy and treatments to remedy the problem.

It's important to take into account that this symptom is a problem of perception and not of vision. Irlen Syndrome, like any other reading problem, can be seen in people who wear prescription lenses as well as those who don't. Those people who do not already wear glasses can use the Irlen spectral filters without any problems. For those who have these symptoms, one or various colours which form part of the visual spectrum, affect the speed and the consistency with which the brain can interpret visual information presented to them, be it printed text or environmental stimuli.

Various studies have corroborated the existence of Irlen Syndrome and suggest that it affects approximately 12 – 15% of the general public. Studies carried out in the USA suggest this to be about 17 million people. This increases drastically when special needs candidates are evaluated, where the amount is considered to be about 45%. In the '*Ginebra Centre for Autism*' in Canada, a recent study showed that 77% of individuals within the Autism Disorder Spectrum suffer from a co-existence of Irlen Syndrome.

From a general point of view, amongst the most common reading problems in which this Syndrome can exist are:

- ★ very slow reading
- ★ poor comprehension
- ★ reading for a very short time
- ★ reading in the dark
- ★ reading words incorrectly
- ★ missing words or lines or
- ★ avoiding reading

A large number (but not all) of these readers experience discomfort such as:

- ★ headaches
- ★ nausea
- ★ fatigue
- ★ watery, sore and irritating eyes

Characteristics in their writing may also exist such as:

- ★ writing which goes up or downhill
- ★ unequal letter spacing and sizes
- ★ making errors when copying words
- ★ producing messy work
- ★ errors in math or incorrectly lining up number

People with Irlen Syndrome may also experience a large number of symptoms which interfere with their everyday life like poor spatial awareness causing problems:

- ★ when doing sports

- ★ problems with escalators
- ★ when driving
- ★ or even problems with other car headlights at night

Working in front of the computer can result in tired, strained, watery, sore eyes. Headaches could be the result of light sensitivity and even some classes of migraines can be a direct result of Irlen Syndrome.

Can you imagine what it would feel like not to be able to read or having to make a great effort to do so? In our society, people with reading problems can feel inferior within themselves, may not achieve their full potential, and as a result, may not get the job that they really want. They will never know what their problem is if no one detects the symptoms. For thousands of people, this has been the case, and they have had to learn to live with these barriers for all their life.

When Irlen Syndrome is not identified, the sufferers can be seen as problematic in terms of their behaviour, academic progress and motivation. They are generally considered intelligent but their work does not reflect that intelligence.

Helen Irlen developed and patented evaluations that specifically identify these symptoms, without which people with Irlen would not be able to realize that they are '*seeing*' the world in a different way from everyone else. 'After all is said and done, if the words in my book are moving and I look around at other people's books and their words are moving, I can assume that we are all experiencing the same sensation so it's normal.' This generates a kind of frustration because 'if we are all experiencing the same thing and I am the only one who can't do it well, then the problem must be me.'

The Syndrome is treated through the Irlen Method, personally designed by Helen Irlen. It has been in use since 1983 and is now in 38 countries. The method consists of a series of patient evaluations with different visual stimuli, to find the most serious problems related to the Syndrome. Initially, the symptoms experienced in association with printed text are eliminated using coloured transparencies (designed to filter frequencies of specific light – colours – which could be affecting the perception of the text. After a trial period of specific light (colours) which could be affecting the perception of the text. After a trial period to confirm efficiency of the particular colour, the filter process begins. In the follow-up evaluation, an individual colour is composed from within a combination of 150 colours to completely eliminate the effects of the Syndrome, not only with text but also in the environment.

Independent studies in the Amen Clinics in California have demonstrated a radical change that is generally in the brain through this method, causing the brain to relax and eliminating the frequencies of light that increase stress in the visual information pathways.

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