

Overview

Your eyes are affected by your lifestyle and health conditions. This leaflet highlights how your lifestyle and health affect your eyes. It should not replace information that is given to you by a healthcare professional. If you have any questions about your eyes, please speak to your optometrist.

If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes, please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are eye health specialists.

Smoking

There is good evidence that smoking causes sight loss. Tobacco smoke has up to 4,000 active compounds. Most of these are toxic and potentially damaging to the eyes. Smokers are up to four times more likely to develop age-related macular degeneration (AMD) than non-smokers. AMD is the leading cause of sight loss in the UK. Macular degeneration is when the macula at the back of your eye becomes damaged. This affects your ability to see detail, such as recognising faces or reading or watching television.

Smokers are also more likely than non-smokers to develop cataracts. Cataract is when the lens inside your eye goes cloudy. It does not always affect your vision in the early stages, but tends to get worse as you get older. If it affects your vision you will need an operation to remove the cataract.

The single best thing that you can do for your eyes and to improve your current and future health is to stop smoking. Many smokers want to quit, and you do not have to do it alone. In some areas optometrists work with the NHS to provide services to help you quit. Ask your optometrist if they are able to help you in this way or, if not, can point you to someone who can.

We have produced leaflets on macular degeneration and cataracts. Ask your optometrist for a copy, or visit lookafteryoureyes.org to find out more.

Nutrition

Eating a wide variety of colourful fruit and vegetables, including dark green leaves, is good for your general health and may support good eye health. However, there is no strong evidence about the effect of diet on your eye health.

There are lots of dietary supplements on the market which claim to be beneficial for eye health. There is no good evidence that people should be taking these supplements.

One large trial in the USA showed that taking certain nutritional supplements may slow down AMD progression in some people. It is not clear whether this is the case in the wider population. According to the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the available evidence is not strong enough to recommend making changes to your diet or taking nutritional supplements for AMD. Discuss with your optometrist whether they may be helpful for you.

If you smoke or have been exposed to asbestos, you should not take supplements that contain beta carotene.

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Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is not only good for your general health, but it is also good for your eyes. If you are overweight, you are more likely to develop diabetes. This may in turn affect your eyes (see below). Being overweight means you are more at risk of developing late AMD and cataracts. They are also more at risk of developing late AMD and cataracts.

Staying a healthy weight is also more likely to help keep your blood pressure under control. Having high blood pressure can also affect your eyes (see later).

People who have diabetes are more likely to develop cataract than people who do not.



Diabetes

If you have diabetes, you are more likely to develop cataracts. You may also be more likely to develop glaucoma. Glaucoma is when the pressure inside your eye damages the optic nerve at the back of your eye. We have produced a leaflet on glaucoma. Ask your optometrist for a copy, or visit lookafteryoureyes.org to find out more.

If you have diabetes, you may develop diabetic retinopathy. If you have diabetes, you may develop diabetic retinopathy. Although this does not affect your vision in the early stages, if it is left untreated it may lead to sight loss.

Keeping your blood sugar levels under control can help reduce your risk of developing diabetic retinopathy.

The NHS arranges for most people with diabetes aged 12 and over to have screening for diabetic retinopathy.



If you have diabetes and are aged 12 or over, you should be invited to have screening for diabetic retinopathy. This is to reduce the risk of sight loss, so it is important that you have the screening done if you are eligible. The screening involves putting drops in your eyes to make your pupils larger. You will then have photographs taken of the retina at the back of your eye.

Treatment for diabetic retinopathy is more effective if detected early. This means it is very important that you attend your screening appointments.

The retinal screening only checks to see if you have diabetic retinopathy. It does not check for other eye diseases such as cataracts or glaucoma. It is important that you continue to have regular eye examinations with your optometrist. This is to make sure your vision is clear and comfortable and you have no other eye disease. Your optometrist will tell you how often you should have this done.

High blood pressure and high cholesterol

Hypertension (high blood pressure) and high cholesterol increase your risk of stroke. They also increase your risk of having a blood vessel at the back of your eye bleed or become blocked. Having hypertension or a diet high in fat also increases your risk of developing late AMD and glaucoma.

Having high blood pressure also increases your risk of developing glaucoma. Glaucoma is when the pressure inside your eye damages the optic nerve at the back of your eye.



A stroke happens when a blood vessel in your brain bleeds or becomes blocked. This can affect your vision if it is in the part of the brain that you use to see with. It can lead to blind spots in your vision that may cause problems with reading. It can also mean you are no longer able to drive, and you may bump into things.

If a blood vessel at the back of your eye is blocked or bleeds this may cause serious vision changes. In some cases this may lead to total sight loss in one eye. You can reduce your risk of these problems by keeping your blood pressure and cholesterol levels under control.

Sunshine

If you spend lots of time outdoors, you should protect your eyes from the sun.



Prolonged exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light has been linked to certain eye conditions such as cataract. There also may be a link between exposure to UV light and AMD. If you spend lots of time outdoors, you should protect your eyes from the sun. You can do this by wearing a brimmed hat and well-fitting sunglasses. You can buy sunglasses from a reputable retailer which carry the CE mark. This is the manufacturer's assurance that the sunglasses have been made to the appropriate safety standards.

Screen Use

Many people worry that looking at a screen, such as a computer, tablet or mobile phone, may damage their eyes. There is no evidence that looking at screens will cause your eyes any harm. Looking at something on a screen has advantages over looking at something on paper. With a screen you can alter the contrast, and you can make the print bigger. However, you need to make sure that the reflections from the screen do not get in the way of what you are looking at.

Some people find that looking at a screen for a long time is tiring. To give your eyes a rest, we recommend the 20:20:20 rule. This means that every 20 minutes you should look at something about 20 feet away for about 20 seconds. Although this is only a guide, it does remind you to take regular (short) breaks from screen use.

Looking at a screen for a long time can be quite demanding for your eyes. You may find that you may need to wear glasses for screen use, even if you don't need them for regular use. Your optometrist will be able to advise you on this.

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Summary

Smoking:

Smokers are up to four times more likely to develop age-related macular degeneration (AMD) than non-smokers. The single best thing that you can do for your eyes and to improve your current and future health is to stop smoking.

Nutrition:

Eating a wide variety of colourful fruit and vegetables, including dark green leaves, is good for your general health and may support good eye health.

Weight:

Maintaining a healthy weight is not only good for your general health, but it is also good for your eyes.

Sunshine:

Prolonged exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light has been linked to certain eye conditions such as cataract. If you spend lots of time outdoors, you should protect your eyes from the sun.

Screentime:

Some people find that looking at a screen for a long time is tiring. To give your eyes a rest, we recommend the 20:20:20 rule.

For more information, please talk to your local optometrist

If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes, please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are eye health specialists. An eye examination is a vital health check and should be part of everyone's regular health care.

For clear and helpful information on vision and eye health issues and keeping your eyes healthy, visit:

<https://www.nhs.wales/sa/eye-care-wales/professionals/wgos/member-of-the-public/patient-resources/>

This information is produced collaboratively between NHS Wales and The College of Optometrists.



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