



LOOKING AFTER YOUR EYES

Your eyesight is one of your most vital senses and yet many of us neglect our eyes and do not give their day-to-day maintenance a second thought unless something goes wrong.

While you might be aware of the role lifestyle factors play in heart disease for instance, you might be less aware that smoking and being overweight can contribute towards developing eye diseases such as [cataracts](#), [diabetic retinopathy](#) and [age related macular disease](#).

Here are some of tips for maintaining good eye health:

- **Have an eye test:** It is recommended that you have an eye test by an optometrist at least once every two years and once a year if you're aged over 60.

For information on eye tests see: <http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/1093.aspx>

You may put off an eye test because you do not think there is anything wrong with your sight – but you should remember that optometrists are trained to spot early signs of eye disease that you may not have noticed (you can lose up to 40 per cent of your eyesight without noticing any difference in your vision for instance). Early detection can prevent your sight from getting worse – so remember to go for regular check-ups.

You can find an optometrist near you on the NHS Choices web site:

<http://www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/Pages/ServiceSearchAdditional.aspx?ServiceType=Optician>

Eye diseases that can be detected at an eye test include:

Glaucoma: This is a condition in which high pressure of the fluid and/or poor blood flow in the eye causes damage to the optic nerve.

For more information on glaucoma see:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/glaucoma/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Diabetic retinopathy: This is complication of diabetes in which the retina (the light sensitive area of the back of the eye) may be damaged due to leakiness of the blood vessels serving it.

For more information on diabetic retinopathy see:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/diabetic-retinopathy/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Macular degeneration (AMD): This is deterioration of the macula, part of the retina which is responsible for fine detail at the centre of the field of vision. It is usually age related.

For more information on macular degeneration see:

<http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/macular-degeneration/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Cataracts: Clouding of the eye's natural lens, causing gradual blurring of vision, which mainly affects elderly people.

For more information on cataract see: <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/cataracts-age-related/pages/causes.aspx>

- **Don't smoke:** Most smokers have heard about the link between tobacco and lung cancer but are unaware that tobacco also damages blood vessels behind the eyes. Smoking hugely increases their risk of developing serious eye disease that can lead to blindness. For example, smoking can increase the risk of developing [age related macular degeneration](#), the UK's leading cause of sight loss, by two to four times.

Smokers are also three times more likely to develop [cataracts](#) and run the risk of developing irritation and infection with contact lenses. Smoking can also make diabetic related sight loss worse.

However all these risks will start to drop the minute you give up smoking so contact Quit line on 0800 002200 or the NHS helpline on 0800 1690 169 for information and support on how quit.

For more information on smoking and blindness see: <http://intl-jpubhealth.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/29/2/142>

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/bmj%3B328/7439/537>

- **Keep to a healthy weight:** If you have a Body Mass Index of over 35 you are 80 times more likely to develop diabetes and [diabetic retinopathy](#) than someone with a BMI in the healthy weight range. Overweight people also have double the risk of developing [cataracts](#) compared to people who are a healthy weight and there is also some evidence that it might also increase the risk of developing [dry AMD](#).
- **Eat a healthy balanced diet:** There is a growing body of scientific evidence to suggest that what you eat can affect your susceptibility to eye disease. Fruit and vegetables are rich in antioxidants – chemicals that can protect against cell damage. One particular type of antioxidant called [lutein](#) which is found in leafy dark green vegetables such as spinach and kale and yellow vegetables such as sweet corn, can help protect the retina against damage from ultraviolet light. Carrots are rich in vitamin A which is essential for healthy eye function and there is early evidence (albeit in mice at the moment) that eating food rich in [omega three fatty acids](#) such as oily fish (mackerel, fresh tuna, trout) can reduce the risk of developing [age related macular disease](#).

The Age Related Disease Study has also found that taking high quantities of the antioxidant vitamins A, C, E and beta carotene and the minerals zinc oxide and cupric oxide can help slow the progression of [age related macular disease](#).

- **Protect your eyes from the sun:** Sunlight can damage the retina and lens of the eyes. Wearing sunglasses can help protect you against harmful UVA and UVB rays, which may be a factor in a number of eye diseases including cataract and macular degeneration. Wear good quality dark sunglasses – choose brands with the CE Mark

and British Standard BS EN 1836; 1997, which is a guarantee that the sunglasses offer a safe level of protection.

- **Wear safety goggles;** Always wear safety goggles (European standard BS EN 166) to protect your eyes against DIY accidents.

For more information on keeping your eyes healthy see:

http://www.rnib.org.uk/eyehealth/lookingafteryoureyes/Pages/looking_after_eyes.aspx

http://www.collegeoptometrists.org/index.aspx/pcms/site.Public_Related_Links.Public_Related_Links_Home/

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