



ADVICE FOR THE AGES

Certain changes in vision are inevitable over time, but treating your eyes correctly can prevent major issues down the line.

Eyes, Check

Your peepers show you the whole wide world. In return, show them some love. We asked experts how to protect and care for these sensory organs every day, as well as how to handle common issues and ailments that (wink, wink) come into view as we age.

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WHETHER YOU'VE HAD good vision from the get-go or been wearing specs since age 7, we all hope to see clearly for the long haul. Genetics play a large part in where we start out. “The more near- or far-sighted your parents are, the higher your chances are of needing glasses,” says Brandon Butler, an optometrist at Studio Optix in New York City. Then other factors come into play with age. Presbyopia, for example, which occurs when the eyes’ lenses lose the ability to change shape and focus up close, affects nearly 90 percent of people over 45. Cataract symptoms typically appear in our 60s. And run-of-the-mill dryness may seem inevitable to anyone of any age sitting in front of a computer too long. Good news: This and other concerns are easily treatable and even avoidable. Consider the following habits to help keep your eyes healthy for years to come.

1. Stock Your Kitchen

Just like the rest of our bodies, eyes thrive on a well-rounded diet and regular exercise. No single food (not even carrots, though they do pack vision-supporting vitamin A) holds the secret to a perfect pair, according to aptly named Cleveland ophthalmologist Craig W. See, MD. But aim to enjoy a few superfoods daily: Eggs contain zinc, which reinforces retina

health, as well as lutein and zeaxanthin, which help protect against cataracts (a clouding of the lens that impedes sight) and age-related macular degeneration (the leading cause of vision loss in people 60 and over). Foods high in vitamin C also help prevent cataracts, so load up on citrus and strawberries. And a handful of almonds or a couple of cups of spinach deliver plenty of vitamin E, an antioxidant that fights macular degeneration too.

Then get your heart pumping: A 2020 study published in the *American Journal of Medicine* found that cardiovascular exercise can lower your odds of developing ocular disease. And if you smoke, quit. The habit accelerates the formation of cataracts and contributes to macular degeneration.

2. Keep Them Pristine

Eyes are remarkably self-cleansing, but good hygiene is still imperative. If you wear contacts, change them daily, even if they're marketed for extended use. "Nobody should sleep in their contact lenses," says See; doing so can cause an infection. Always rinse them with contact solution, not water. Butler advises wearing glasses instead of contacts on plane flights, and also drinking lots of water, as the high pressure and recycled air are dehydrating and can increase the risk of infection.

Be careful with cosmetics, too. First, commit to fully removing your makeup before you hit the sack, since sleeping in it can cause inflammation or a painful sty. Never share eye makeup, and skip those testers at the counter—bacteria can grow in the containers. Keep tabs on when beauty

products expire, usually about three to four months after the first use. You'll find an item's exact shelf life, in months, on the tiny open-jar icon on the packaging. (Yes, you may need a magnifying glass to read it.) And apply correctly: Tracing eyeliner along the inner rim can clog the tiny oil glands that coat the surface of your eye, again risking inflammation or a sty. Use pencils just above and below your lash lines instead, and sharpen regularly.

3. Wear Shades

Sunglasses do a lot more than save you from squinting. Prolonged exposure to bright rays (from skiing without goggles, or sitting on the beach sans Wayfarers) can burn your corneas and cause a condition called photokeratitis, or snow blindness. It resolves itself within a few days, but you may experience headaches, eye irritation, and blurred vision. People who spend long stretches in the sun, like lifeguards and golfers, are at risk of developing a pterygium, aka surfer's eye, a growth of gritty-feeling, fleshy pink tissue on the conjunctiva (the clear matter on the surface of the eye). So when you head outdoors, even for just a few minutes, grab large frames that offer UVA and UVB protection; wraparound styles are ideal.

Protective eyewear is also crucial to preventing physical injuries that can cause vision loss, says David M. Kleinman, MD, an associate professor of ophthalmology at the University of Rochester, in New York. Wear safety glasses or goggles when wielding power tools, hanging frames, doing yard work, or playing sports with small balls, such as squash.

4. Survey Your Screen Habits

The blue light from your laptop might make it harder to fall asleep at night, but it won't harm your vision. Too much screen time can, however, lead to computer vision syndrome, says Elena B. Roth, MD, an assistant professor of clinical ophthalmology at the University of Miami Health System, when eyes get dry and tired. (Excess tears, counterintuitively, are a sign of this condition.) An easy fix: Blink! According to the University of Iowa Hospitals & Clinics, we do it 66 percent less while we're typing away. Also, optimize your setup. "Adjust the screen so your eyes are level with the top of it and you're looking slightly down," says Monica M. Dweck, MD, an ophthalmologist at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary of Mount Sinai. Gazing at that angle exposes less of your eyes' surface area to the air, reducing overall strain. A few more soothers: Increase your text size (a separate, larger monitor will let you blow it up significantly) or, if you work near a window, install a glare-reducing filter on your screen. Then play that old chestnut "20-20-20": Every 20 minutes, look at a spot 20 feet away for 20 seconds. And when you sign off for the day (or anytime your eyes feel sore or irritated), switch from contacts to glasses. This helps prevent issues including hypoxia, a lack of oxygen in the cornea that can lead to redness and even vision loss, says Butler.

5. Know When to Say, "What's Up, Doc?"

Certain symptoms warrant immediate medical attention: If you experience a sudden loss of vision (even if it returns), or a curtain seems to fall across your field of vision, you could have a blocked carotid artery—go straight to your eye doctor or the ER. Floaters (gray specks or cobwebs in your vision), flashing lights, or a hazy shadow can be signs of a detached or torn retina. Severe eye pain, an intense headache, blurred vision, or redness could be symptoms of acute angle-closure glaucoma (a rapid increase in eye pressure that requires immediate medical care) or other serious issues. Redness is also a red flag for infection. If something hits your eye, disrupting vision or causing pain or persistent irritation, get it checked out.

If you wear prescription glasses or readers, or have a medical condition that may affect your eyes, such as diabetes, lupus, or high blood pressure, ask your optometrist (who has a doctorate in optometry and examines, diagnoses, and treats your pair) or ophthalmologist (an MD who can perform medical and surgical treatments) how often you should be examined; the standard is about once a year. Otherwise, follow the American Academy of Ophthalmology's schedule and get one comprehensive eye exam in your 20s and two in your 30s. Schedule another at 40, and then follow your ophthalmologist's recommendations until you hit 65, at which point you should get an exam every year or two.