



Looking after your eyes



At 40, you should have a full eye examination, with follow-up exams about every two years (or more often if recommended by your optician). Age increases the risk of cataracts, glaucoma and macular degeneration, but if detected early, the development of some diseases can be slowed or halted.

At 70 and beyond, you should have a full eye examination every year, even if you think your vision is good. **If you are 60 or over you can get an eye test for free.**

Who is eligible for a free eye test?

Children under the age of 16 or under 19 if they are in full time education

People over the age of 60

People claiming benefits (income support, income-based jobseeker's allowance) or receiving Working Families Tax Credit or Disabled Persons' Tax Credit (both less than £70 withdrawn)

People with diabetes

People with glaucoma and people over the age of 40 who are closely related to someone with glaucoma

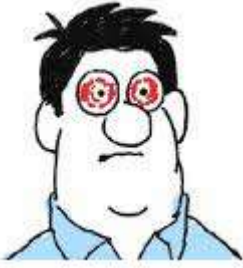
People who are registered blind or partially sighted

Those on a low income

People who are eligible for NHS complex lens vouchers

To find out whether you're entitled to a free eye test, pick up a leaflet from your local health centre or optician, or log on to www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk.





When should I be worried about my eyes?

If you develop any pain, redness, watering, swelling, decreased vision/blurring, double vision, distortion, flashing lights or floaters.

In these cases you should seek further advice from your GP or your local accident and emergency department.

Common Eye conditions

Blepharitis- Blepharitis is the medical term for inflamed eyelids. The inflammation is like eczema of the skin, with red, scaly eyelids. Your eyes may be tired or gritty and uncomfortable in sunlight or a smoky atmosphere. They may be slightly red, and feel as though there is something in them.



The eyelids have tiny glands in them. These glands make substances that mix with tears, and help the tears to spread across the eye. This thin layer of tears lubricates the eyes, stops them drying out, and keeps them comfortable.

However, as you get older, these glands can block. As a result the glands do not make the chemicals that enables the tears to spread evenly across the front of the eye.

As a result, the tears break up, and dry patches develop on the surface of the eye. These patches make the eyes feel sore or gritty.

Blepharitis is not usually a serious condition. However, treatment is needed to make the eye more comfortable.

In a very few people the blepharitis can be severe and damage the eyelids, and treatment can prevent more damage occurring.

The treatment is aimed at

1. unblocking the glands in the eyelid, which may be infected and inflamed, like acne on the face or a tiny boil by [Lid Cleaning](#)
2. replacing the tears if the eyes are dry with [Lubricants](#) (dry eyes and blepharitis may occur together: see below).

You should see your GP or optician for further advice regarding blepharitis treatment. The treatment should make your eyes more comfortable, but there is no magic cure. Even with treatment your eyes may remain a little sore, but no harm will come to them and there is nothing to worry about.

Glaucoma- This is a very important condition which can lead to blindness is not picked up early. It is caused by too much fluid pressing on the nerve at the back of the eye. There are many types of glaucoma. It is not a single disease, but represents conditions that occur for different reasons with the final event being optic nerve damage and visual field loss.

Symptoms to look out for include headache, painful , red eyes or nausea/vomiting which are suggestive of acute glaucoma (sudden increase pressure in the eye).

Chronic glaucoma can be asymptomatic, it is therefore important to have your eyes checked regularly in order to detect this. It affects 2 in 100 people over the age of 40 and is more common in increasing age groups. If you have relative with glaucoma you are eligible for a free eye test.

At first the sight is normal, but if the glaucoma is severe, the sight may get progressively worse as opposite.

You cannot 'feel' glaucoma, and usually would not know there was anything wrong in the early stages.



At first the sight is normal



then a small area of poor vision may develop



this can extend, affecting much of of the sight, or nearly all the sight



Cataracts- A cataract is a clouding of a part of your eye, called the lens. Your vision may become blurred. Many people over the age of 60 do have some cataract and the vast majority can be treated successfully by an operation.

A cataract will not damage your eye in any way. It can be operated on fairly safely at any time. A cataract may change the focusing in the eye, and you may need new spectacles now and again.

Some cataracts get worse quickly, others slowly: most do get worse over months or years. If your sight gets worse very slowly, the cataract is only slowly becoming thick.

The thicker or cloudier the cataract becomes, the worse the sight. A doctor cannot predict with certainty. If you think you do have cataracts or your sight is becoming worse, ask your optometrist (optician) or the doctor in the hospital eye clinic.

If you are a driver it is important to ensure you still reach driving standards- you can get this checked by your optician. You may also notice great difficulty driving at night, when car headlights are shining into your eye. This may be so bad you have to stop

driving at night, and at this stage, if you want to keep driving, you may need a cataract operation.

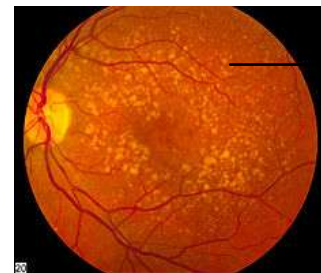


Age Related Macular Degeneration (AMD)- A part of the eye called the 'macula' is damaged in this condition. The macula is important for what you see in front of you, for fine detail for activities such as reading and writing as well as ability to see colour. In this condition you may notice your central vision is disturbed or you can not see fine detail clearly.



what someone with AMD sees- loss of central vision

There are two types 'Dry' and 'Wet'. Although the dry form is most common (leading to slow gradual loss of central vision), unfortunately there is no medical treatment for this type, however magnifying aids and bright lights can help. Eating healthily with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables is known to prevent dry AMD. Some antioxidants and vitamin supplements may be of benefit but some specialists believe if you eat healthily these supplements can actually be harmful - see your optician for further details.

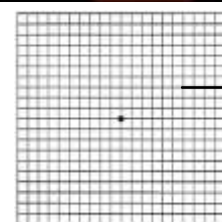


Dry AMD

Sometimes the 'dry' type can convert into the 'wet' type, a change in vision or distortion may be noted. This can be monitored using the chart seen in the picture above (amsler chart). Another easy way is looking at a door frame with your good eye covered and seeing if there is any distortion present. If there is and this is new you should see your optician. The 'Wet' form causes bleeding and scarring leading to loss of vision. Laser/injections can sometimes treat certain types of 'Wet' AMD. Stopping smoking is important in stopping the progression of AMD



Wet AMD



Amsler chart

Eye Conditions related to Diabetes- Your sight is more likely to be affected if you are

diabetic and it is not well controlled. Your blood pressure and cholesterol levels also need to be well controlled. Poor control of diabetes may result in loss of sight. Therefore, regular annual examinations are necessary to detect any eye abnormalities at an early stage.

What It's Like



This is how a street scene looks with normal vision.



The same scene with diabetic retinopathy.

Common conditions affecting the eye can be:

Temporary blurring of vision

Cataracts

Diabetic retinopathy

Diabetic maculopathy

Treatment may be in the form of laser/injections or an operation to remove the cataract.

All the information provided above is limited in detail. If you have any concerns regarding your eyes please see your optician or GP in the first instance and they will guide you as appropriate. A good website for clear, more detailed information (with good pictures) on all eye diseases is:

<http://www.goodhope.org.uk>.

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