

Aging and Your Eyes

Age can bring changes that affect your eyesight. But regular eye exams can help. With early detection, many eye problems can be treated and your risk of vision loss reduced.

What Can Happen To My Eyes As I Get Older?

Along with low vision, the following are some common eye complaints that occur with age. They can be treated easily, but may also be signs of more serious problems.

- **Presbyopia** is a slow loss of ability to see close objects or small print. It is a normal process that happens as you get older. Reading glasses can often fix the problem.
- **Floaters** are tiny spots or specks that seem to float across your eyes. They are normal, but may also be a sign of retinal detachment. If you notice a change in the type or number of spots, see your doctor right away.
- **Tearing** can be caused by light, wind, or temperature changes. Wearing sunglasses may help the problem.
- **Corneal diseases and conditions** can cause redness, watery eyes, pain, reduced vision, or a halo effect. Treatments include changing your eyeglass prescription, using eye drops, or in more serious cases, having surgery.
- **Eyelid problems** can come from different diseases or conditions. Common eyelid complaints include pain, itching, tearing, or being sensitive to light. Eyelid problems often can be treated with medicine or surgery.
- **Conjunctivitis**, also known as “pink eye,” happens when the tissue that lines the eyelids and covers the eye becomes inflamed. It can cause itching, burning, tearing, or a feeling of something in your eye. It can be caused by allergies or an infection, and can be very infectious. But it is easily treated.

What Eye Diseases May Affect Me As I Grow Older?

As you grow older, you have a greater chance of developing eye disease or disorders. They can lead to vision loss or blindness if they are not treated. Here are some problems that can develop with age:

- **Cataracts.** These are cloudy areas in the eye’s lens. Cataracts often form slowly without any symptoms. Your doctor can watch for changes in your cataract over time to see if you need treatment.
- **Dry eye.** This can happen when tear glands do not work well.

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What Eye Diseases May Affect Me As I Grow Older? (Continued)

Dry eye causes itching, burning, or even some vision loss. Home humidifiers or special eye drops help. More serious cases may need surgery.

- **Glaucoma.** This disease comes from having too much fluid pressure inside the eye, which can damage the optic nerve and cause vision loss or blindness. Usually there are no early symptoms or pain. To protect yourself have regular, dilated eye exams.
- **Retinal disorders.** These are a leading cause of blindness in the U.S. The ones that affect aging eyes include:
 - ✓ **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD).** Over time, AMD can ruin the sharp vision and make it difficult to see objects clearly and to do everyday common tasks. In some cases, AMD can be treated with lasers to reduce the risk of increased vision loss.
 - ✓ **Diabetic retinopathy.** This is a common complication of diabetes. If you have diabetes, be sure to have an eye exam through dilated pupils every year.
 - ✓ **Retinal detachment.** If you notice changes in floaters or light flashes in your eye, the inner and outer layers of your retina have may be separating. See your doctor immediately.

When To Seek Help? Visit your eye doctor (ophthalmologist) if you or someone else notices that you:

- Squint - you may have a greater sensitivity to light and glare;
- Choose bright over dull colored objects or clothing;
- Spill food or drinks because you misjudge where objects really are;
- Find it hard to copy from written texts;
- Are getting "clumsy" - you have a hard time threading a needle, buttoning a shirt or finding food on your plate;
- See flashes of light or rapid movement from the corner of your eyes;
- Experience difficulties with sharpness and contrast while driving at night;
- Experience uncontrolled eye movement;
- Make driving mistakes - you miss street or traffic signs. This is important for your safety and the safety of others.

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When To Seek Help? (Continued)

- Older drivers with vision impairment are more likely to be involved in a car accident.
- Have fallen because of a missed step or an object on the floor that you didn't see.

What Can I Do If I Have Low Vision?

Low vision can't be fixed with glasses, contacts, medicine, or surgery. However, it does not have to hamper your lifestyle.

Vision Aids

Many aids are available to help you read, write, and manage daily tasks. For instance:

- Prescription reading glasses and magnifying aids.
- Large-print reading materials and books on tape or CDs.
- Electronic reading machines.
- Computers that use large print and/or speech.
- Telephones, clocks, and watches with large numbers.

Your primary care team may recommend other professional services, such as an occupational therapist, to help you decide on the vision aid that is right for you.

Simple Changes

You can also make other simple changes to help your vision:

- Write with bold, black felt-tip markers and use paper with bold lines to help you write straight.
- Put colored tape on the edge of your steps to avoid a fall.
- Install dark-colored light switches and electrical outlets that you can see easily against light-colored walls.
- Use motion lights that turn themselves on when you enter a room.
- Put large-print labels on the microwave and stove.

How Can I Protect My Eyesight?

Age can bring changes that affect your eyesight, but regular eye exams can detect problems early. Many eye problems can be treated. Here are 5 steps to protecting your eyes:

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How Can I Protect My Eyesight? (Continued)

- See your primary care team for a periodic health exam to monitor your eyesight and check for any conditions that may cause eye problems.
- Have a complete eye exam with an eye care professional every 1 to 2 years.
- Find out if you are at high-risk for vision loss. If you have a family history of diabetes or eye disease, you should have an eye exam every year.
- See an eye care professional at once if you have any loss or dimness of eyesight, eye pain, fluid coming from the eye, double vision, redness, or swelling of the eye or lid.
- Wear sunglasses and a hat with a wide brim when outside. This will protect your eyes from too much sunlight, which can raise your risk of getting cataracts.

Resources Organizations

Canadian Ophthalmological Society

Web site: www.eyesite.ca

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Tel. 416 486-2500

Web site: www.cnib.ca

Canadian Association of Optometrists

Web site: www.opto.ca

Ministry of Transportation - Vision and Driving

Web site: www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/pubs/yourdriving.htm

Canadian Occupational Therapy Association

Web site: www.otworks.ca

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