



Image of the BAME Vision Logo

Each year, National Eye Health Week takes place in the 3rd week of September

Introduction

Vision is the sense people fear losing the most, yet many of us don't know how to look after our eyes - National Eye Health Week aims to change all that to help promote the importance of good eye health and the need for regular testing.

1. Diet and Nutrition <http://www.visionmatters.org.uk/downloads/nutrition-and-the-eye.pdf>
2. Exercise
3. Alcohol
4. Smoking
5. The Sun
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Lifestyle

Diet, Nutrition and Hydration

The food we eat has a huge impact on our eyesight. However, a recent survey revealed that 60% of people living in the UK have no idea about the link between a good diet and healthy eyesight. The vitamins and minerals found in fruit, vegetables and other wholesome foods can help protect our sight and keep our eyes healthy.

Natural foods that are really beneficial to eye health are generally those that are colourful in appearance and contain carotenoids which are essential for healthy eyes. Fruits such as oranges, blueberries, grapes, mango, and vegetables such as sweetcorn, carrots, butternut squash, red peppers and - most importantly - green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, spinach and kale are foods that are all really rich in carotenoids and act as antioxidants which are nature's way of getting rid of harmful cells and help keep our eyes healthy.

Carotenoids also may help reduce the discomfort from glare and help to enhance visual contrasts which supports our eyes ability to distinguish between colours and shapes. Soy is also known to be very beneficial for good eye health as it contains vitamin E and other essential natural anti-inflammatory agents. All of the above foods, and many others, including eggs, and oily fish such as salmon, mackerel and tuna all naturally contain essential nutrients that are beneficial to healthy eyes.

<http://www.visionmatters.org.uk/looking-after-your-eyes/looking-after-your-eyes>

Water

Drinking plenty of water every day is also essential for healthy eyes as they can easily become dehydrated which is severely harmful to eyes. Dehydration and distorted vision are often closely related. This happens because when we are dehydrated our eyes become dry and sore which causes eye strain which in turn leads to blurred vision which is often followed by vision headaches or migraine. When we drink water we are also adding oxygen to our brain and eyes and we all know we can't survive without oxygen. So it is really important to make drinking plenty of water part of a daily routine for good eye health. The Food Standards Agency recommends that we drink approximately 1.2 litres (6-8 glasses) of water every day and more if exercising or if the weather is hot.

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/content/ten-steps-healthy-eyes>

Exercise

According to evidence from Moorfields Eye Hospital in London our eyes need oxygen to stay healthy and comfortable. There is growing scientific evidence that aerobic exercise can increase oxygen to the optic nerve and lower pressure in the eye. Reducing this pressure can help control conditions such as high blood pressure (hypertension) and glaucoma.

Lack of exercise is said to contribute significantly to several eye conditions especially to those over 60 years old. Exercise is known to reduce hardening or narrowing of the arteries and which in turn reduces the risk of diabetes and high cholesterol all conditions which may negatively affect good eye health.

Exercise does not have to mean going to the gym or running a marathon. Simply 30 minutes brisk (or two lots of 15 minutes) walking at least five times a week will help with good eye health. Brisk walks, swimming, cycling, jogging, yoga, pilates and dancing or any form of activity that elevates the heart rate for short periods of time will all help to reduce pressure in the eyes.

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/content/ten-steps-healthy-eyes>

Alcohol

Alcohol is a diuretic which causes dehydration. This is due to the excessive loss of fluid either through the passing of urine more frequently or through sweating. As stated previously dehydration is not good for eye health. In addition alcohol also raises blood sugar levels which leads to blurred vision as it causes the eye's lens to swell which reduces the ability to see. It can take up to 24 hours, with no more alcohol consumed, for blood sugar levels and vision to return to normal.

If we drink too much alcohol our blood pressure rises which in turn increases the possibility of hypertensive retinopathy which causes damage to the tiny delicate vessels that supply blood to the eye's retina, the area at the back of the eye that allows us to focus on images. The higher the blood pressure and the longer it has been elevated, the higher the risk of the damage. This condition may gradually improve if steps are taken to consistently lower blood pressure.

Excessive drinking of alcohol, even for a short period of time, will interfere with our liver's ability to function properly because it reduces the levels of glutathione which is an efficient antioxidant that can help protect against common eye disease. Heavy consumption of alcohol may increase the risk of AMD (Age-related Macular Degeneration) <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/age-related-macular-degeneration-amd/>

Advice from the Department of Health recommends that men should not drink more than 3 to 4 units of alcohol per day and that women should not drink more than 2 units per day.

<https://www.moorfields.nhs.uk/content/ten-steps-healthy-eyes>

Smoking

Smoking has been said to have a close association with strong or malignant hypertensive retinopathy (which causes damage to the tiny delicate vessels that supply blood to the eye's retina, the area at the back of the eye that allows us to focus on images) due to elevated blood pressure levels.

Smokers are far more likely to develop AMD (Age-related Macular Degeneration) which is the most common cause of sight-loss in the UK, and cataracts.

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/look-after-your-eyes/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/10-self-help-tips-to-stop-smoking/?tabname=smoking-facts>

The Sun

We should never look directly at the sun as this can lead to irreversible damage to eyes or even blindness. There are studies that show that sunlight exposure can be a risk factor related to those who develop cataracts (see below).

Excessive exposure to the sun's UV rays can lead to a sunburn-like condition called photokeratitis. This can be extremely painful and make your eyes red, swollen and watery. The symptoms of this condition are an inflammation of the outer layer of the cornea, which typically occurs after 6 – 12 hours exposure and will normally clear up quickly causing no permanent damage to the eye.

Unfortunately the damaging effect of ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun accumulate over a number of years so that by the time we are 18 we will already have been exposed to too much UV rays. For this reason it is never too early to start protecting our children's eyes.

The general advice is, if possible wear a wide brimmed hat/ sunglasses that can help protect your eyes from the harmful UV rays of the sun. Wear dark glasses, they need not be expensive. Ensure sunglasses filter AT LEAST 99 per cent of UVA and UVB light and look out for the Look for sunglasses glasses carrying the CE mark or the British Standard BS EN ISO 12312-1:2013, which ensures they offer a safe level of ultraviolet protection.

<http://www.visionmatters.org.uk/looking-after-your-eyes/looking-after-your-eyes>

Cataracts

Cataracts occur when the lens, a small transparent disc inside your eye, develops cloudy patches. As we get older, they start to become frosted, like bathroom glass, and begin to limit our vision. Over time these patches usually become bigger causing blurry, misty vision and eventually. It may be recommended to wear glasses or contacts with stronger lenses. But unfortunately cataracts will become worse and surgery is the only way to treat them. Thankfully, cataract surgery is one of the most common and straightforward operations, usually done as day surgery with no need to stay overnight in hospital.

There are three known types of cataracts

Nuclear cataract – The most common type, usually caused by ageing.

Cortical cataract Forms in the lens cortex that surrounds the nucleus of the eye.

Subcapsular cataract – Forms at the back of the lens, and can be caused by diabetes and other factors.

<https://lookafteryoureyes.org/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ataracts/#:~:text=Cataracts%20are%20when%20the%20lens,misty%20vision%20and%20eventually%20blindness>

Eye Tests & Vouchers

A sight test can detect early signs of conditions like glaucoma which can be treated if found soon enough. During a sight test other conditions such as diabetes or high blood pressure may be detected. For most people it is recommended that you should have an eye test every two years.

Free Eye tests - are available In England, Northern Ireland and Wales for eligible people eg

- Aged under 16
- Aged 16 - 18 and In full time education
- Claiming Benefit such as Universal Credit
- On a low income
- Claiming Tax credits

In Scotland eye examinations are free for everyone.

NHS Vouchers

If test results show that you do need glasses or contact lenses, then the NHS gives Optical Vouchers for those eligible.

Visit the Vision Matters website for more information <http://www.visionmatters.org.uk/sight-tests/eligibility-and-vouchers>

Or contact your healthcare advisor

Eye Health During the Pandemic

It is important to attend eye appointments whether it's a routine, regular or follow up appointment, or for an injection, or if you are in need of emergency advice. You should attend unless you have been advised otherwise or, of course if you are showing symptoms of coronavirus.

For advice on preparing for an appointment please follow this link to a video from the RNIB

<https://www.nib.org.uk/sight-loss-advice/eye-health/eye-health-and-appointments-during-coronavirus>

Where three Eye Clinic Liaison Officers (ECLOs) offer their advice and tips on what you can expect

You can also download a transcript of the video

The following is taken directly from the RNIB website

Staff at hospitals and eye clinics are usually available to provide information and reassurance if you have any queries. Call them directly ahead of time; if no-one is available to take your call immediately, some may have recorded information available or leave a voicemail to request a call back. If you can't make your appointment, always let your clinician, or ECLO, know so they can reschedule it and offer the time to other patients.

Eye care in England

Routine eye examinations were suspended in England when lockdown began in March 2020 but were restarted on 15 June 2020 in England only (there are different arrangements in place in the rest of the UK). Read about the [precautions that opticians and optometrists have put in place](#) to protect patients and staff from coronavirus.

Eye care in Scotland

If you live in Scotland, find out about the newly-created [Emergency Eye Care Treatment Centres](#).

Eye care in Wales

Dr Gwyn William, Consultant Ophthalmologist, explains what is happening with [eye care appointments across Wales](#) due to coronavirus.

Sight Advice FAQ

Sight Advice FAQ, the website which answers common questions about living with sight loss, has information for on [eye health and medical needs during coronavirus](#)

The NHS Diabetic Eye Screening Programme

Prioritising patients at highest risk of developing sight threatening diabetic eye disease

To help the NHS respond to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, most local diabetic eye screening (DES) services were unable to provide screening appointments during lockdown. The NHS has been working to restore diabetic eye screening safely whilst considering social distancing and personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements. This means that your local diabetic eye screening service may not be able to see as many people as they would normally as more time will be required between appointments to clean equipment, waiting areas and clinic spaces.

People at greater risk of sight loss are now being prioritised for screening, and those at very low risk of sight loss may have their appointment delayed.

Longer screening intervals for those at lowest risk of sight loss

If you attended your last invited screening appointment and there was no retinopathy detected, there is very little risk of you developing sight threatening disease before your next appointment.

To help local services restore diabetic eye screening safely, people who attended their last appointment and had no retinopathy will be invited for their next screening appointment at a longer interval than normal. The maximum time between appointments for this group of people will be two years, and research shows that this is safe.

This allows enough appointments to be available to screen people who are at higher risk of developing sight threatening retinopathy and will allow others to be screened when it is safe and clinically appropriate.

If you have waited for longer than two years, please [contact us](#).

If you have any sudden problems or symptoms with your vision or eyes, please contact your local optician or GP for advice, or attend eye casualty.

Avoiding Foggy Lenses/Cleaning Lenses While Wearing Facial Coverings

Many people have been concerned , bothered or bemused about wearing their glasses while having to wear a facial covering in public settings since the government told us all it was necessary for helping to contain the spread of coronavirus. As many have found hot breath causes steam on glasses making it difficult to see. So Eye Health UK has compiled a list of Top Tips to help Britain's 30+ million spectacle wearers beat the fog!

TOP TIPS TO AVOID FOGGY GLASSES WHEN WEARING A FACIAL MASK OR COVERING!

1. Keep Your Lenses Clean.

Using your regular lens cleaning solution will create a fine film on the surface of the lens that will disperse fine molecules from your breath and stop the lens from misting up.

Note: if you don't have a lens cleaner try simply washing your glasses in warm soapy water - washing up liquid works just as well - prior to travelling. Gently shake off any excess water and leave to air dry (or gently dry with a soft lint free cloth)

Nb **never** use a paper towel or your sleeve to clean your lens or anything abrasive

2. Apply An Anti-fog Lens Coating Or Spray

A dispensing optician can remote (telephone/email or video conference) advice on anti-fog lens coating or off the shelf anti-fog spray, waxes or gels that are available to order online.

3. Seal It Up

Use double-sided sticky tape to ensure your mask fits snugly across the bridge of your nose and cheek bones. This is not recommended for extended wear.

4. A Good Fit

A well fitted mask will dramatically reduce the amount of air escaping. Masks with a mouldable frame can help you achieve a good fit.

If you're wearing a homemade mask, try sewing a channel along the top wedge of the mask and inserting a pipe cleaner (or similar) so you can shape the fit around your facial features.

5. Double Strap Tying Technique

A useful trick used by hospital surgeons is to tie the top straps of a surgical mask firmly below the ears before tying the bottom straps above the ears around the crown of the head. This forms a snug fit across your nose and cheeks and vents air from the side of the mask.

6. Breathe In A Downward Direction

As a temporary fix you can try breathing downwards so the air you breathe flows away from your glasses.

Technique: Hold your upper lip over your lower lip. Then blow air downward, as if you're playing a flute.

Remember to always fit your mask to your face NOT to the frame of your glasses!

<http://visionmatters.or.uk/news/news>

<http://www.visionmatters.org.uk/looking-after-your-eyes/looking-after-your-eyes>

This document has been put together by the BAME Vision Committee.