



Division of Aging and Seniors

Vision care Info-Sheet for Seniors

As we get older it is normal that our vision changes. Our eyes may find it harder to read small print, take longer to adjust from light to dark and be more sensitive to glare from sunlight or unshielded light bulbs. There's a decline in depth perception that can make it hard to judge distances, and perceiving contrasts and colours becomes more difficult.

Sight provides much pleasure, but it's also an important part of staying safe and independent. Because our eyes do so much for us, they deserve good care and attention.

Be kind to your eyes!

Turn on the lights. Seeing better can sometimes be as easy as changing a light bulb! Putting 100 or 150-watt bulbs in your lamps can reduce eye strain (but make sure your fixture is designed for that wattage!). Brighter lighting in stairways can help prevent falls.

Don't smoke. Studies show that tobacco smoking is the biggest risk factor in the early onset of an eye disease called Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD). This disease

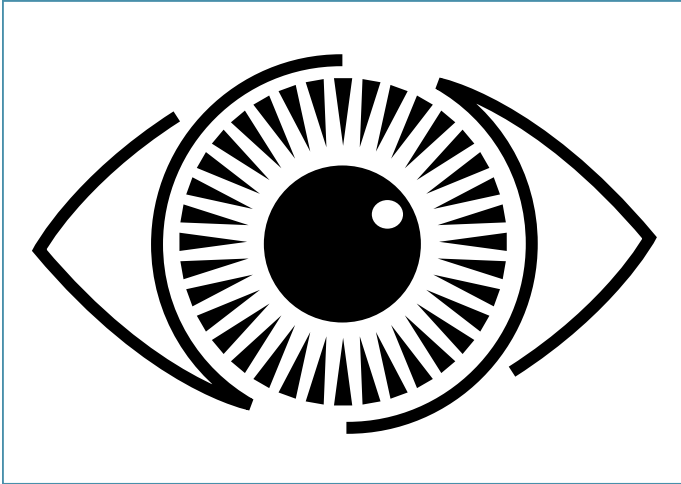
causes serious and permanent loss of central vision.

Reduce glare. Lampshades, glare shields on TV screens and computer monitors and wearing sunglasses are simple ways to compensate for increased sensitivity. Wear sunglasses that provide 99 to 100% UV-A and UV-B protection when you go outside during the day. They will protect you from UV rays that can harm your eyes even on a cloudy day.

Protect yourself. Many people suffer vision loss because of accidents in the home. Some ways to prevent damage to your eyes are:

- put a grease shield over frying foods
- make sure that spray cans and bottle nozzles are pointed away from you
- wear safety glasses in the workshop and when opening and using chemical products like ammonia

Eat your carrots. Studies show that a daily dose of the vitamins and minerals found in melons, citrus, carrots, spinach and kale may help slow the progress of age-related eye diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma or cataracts. Ask your doctor if he agrees with making these changes to your daily diet.



Stay active. Some studies report that glaucoma patients who exercise at least three times a week can reduce their eye pressure by as much as 20%. Since some bouncing exercises can be harmful to glaucoma patients, ask your doctor for safe suggestions.

Have an annual eye exam. Many changes to vision happen so slowly, you may not realize that you have a problem. If you are over 45 years of age, the most important thing you can do to protect your vision is to have an eye exam every year. Finding problems early may make the difference between vision change and vision loss.

Vision changes

Here are the most common changes that come with age:

Presbyopia is a loss of clear vision of close objects or small print. Reading glasses usually solve the problem.

Visit your eye doctor if you or someone else notices that you:

- squint – you may have a greater sensitivity to light and glare
- choose bright over dull coloured 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 “night blindness”
- experience uncontrolled eye movement
- make driving mistakes – you miss street or traffic signs. This is important for your safety and the safety of others. Older drivers with vision impairment are 200% more likely to be involved in an auto accident
- have fallen because of a missed step or an object on the floor that you didn’t see

Cataracts are cloudy areas that keep light from passing through the lens to the retina at the back of the eye. If the central part of the lens is cloudy, you may not be able to read or drive unless the cataract is removed. 95% of cataract surgeries are successful.



Floaters are tiny spots or specks that float across the field of vision, that are often normal. If a floater appears right in your line of vision, move your eye around, and it will probably go away. If you notice a sudden change in the number or types of spots you see, or if they come with light flashes, see your eye doctor as soon as you can. These may be signs of a serious problem.

Dry eyes can become a problem if your tear glands are not making enough tears. Your eyes may feel gritty, itchy or burning. Your doctor may suggest using a humidifier in your home, or special eye drops that act as tears. In a few serious cases, surgery may be needed to correct the problem.

Tearing can become a problem when your tear glands make too many tears. It may be because you are very sensitive to light, wind or changes in temperature. Simply protecting your eyes by shielding them or wearing sunglasses may solve the problem. Or it may be a result of an eye infection or blocked tear duct, which can be treated. See your doctor to find the exact cause and treatment.

Vision loss

While finding and treating serious eye problems early may stop or slow it down, most vision loss is permanent. Early treatment can give you time to learn ways to remain active with low or

no vision. You can discover ways to adapt to vision loss by contacting a local eye care centre or the Canadian National Institute for the Blind.

Here are the most common reasons for age-related vision loss:

Glaucoma is an eye problem that develops when there is too much fluid pressure inside the eye. If not treated early, it can cause vision loss and blindness. Because most people have no early symptoms, it is very important to have regular eye exams. Treatment may include eye drops, medicine and/or surgery.

Age-related macular degeneration is an eye disease that occurs when the macula at the back of the eye is damaged due to aging or conditions such as diabetes. This disease results in permanent loss of central vision. Regular eye exams can detect the disease early on and laser treatments can slow down central vision loss.

Diabetic retinopathy is an eye problem linked to diabetes. It happens when the retina does not get enough oxygen. Symptoms include cloudy vision and seeing spots. This condition goes through many stages and can result in blindness. If you have diabetes, see your eye doctor regularly to check for changes in your vision. Treatment can slow down vision loss. Laser treatment in the early stages often proves successful.



For most seniors, normal age-related vision loss can be corrected or stopped with glasses, medicine or surgery.

For others, using vision aids and making changes to their homes and routines help them stay safe and independent.

For those who have more serious vision loss, there are many services available to help you through this difficult period of adjustment.

For more information...

If you want to have your eyes checked or treated, look under **Optometrists** in the Yellow Pages.

To learn more about eye problems, falls prevention, vision and driving, or on how to live an active life with vision loss, call the following organizations or visit their Web sites:

Eye conditions and vision loss

Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Tel.: (416) 486-2500

www.cnib.ca/

This Web site provides a wealth of information on eye conditions, vision loss and how to get help.

Falls prevention

Public Health Agency of Canada
Division of Aging and Seniors
Tel.: (613) 952-7606

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines
This Web site offers publications on home safety, assistive devices, falls prevention, etc.

Driving

Ontario Ministry of Transportation

www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/pubs/you_rdriving.htm

This Web site provides tips and advice that seniors can use to improve the safety of their driving.

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Public Health Agency of Canada
www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines*

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