

Vision and ageing

What to expect and what's preventable

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GROWING older brings wisdom and experience but it also brings changes to the body, including the eyes. Vision changes are a natural part of aging, yet many people are unprepared for them or assume vision loss is unavoidable. The good news is that while some changes are normal, many serious eye conditions can be prevented or treated if detected early. Understanding what to expect and what you can do about it is essential to protecting sight throughout life.



One of the earliest and most common age-related changes is difficulty focusing on nearby objects, a condition known as presbyopia. Many adults begin noticing this in their 40s, when reading small print becomes harder and books or phones must be held farther away to see clearly. This occurs because the eye's lens gradually loses flexibility, making it harder to focus up close. Reading glasses, bifocals, or progressive lenses usually correct the problem easily.

Another typical change is the need for more light. Older eyes require brighter lighting to see clearly, and adjusting to darkness may take longer than before. Night driving can become challenging due to glare from headlights and reduced contrast sensitivity. Simple steps such as improving home lighting, using anti-glare lenses, and scheduling daytime driving when possible can help maintain safety and independence.

Dry eyes also become more common with age. Tear production decreases, causing irritation, burning, or a gritty sensation. Environmental factors like air conditioning, wind, or extended screen time can worsen symptoms. Arti

cial tears, staying hydrated, and taking regular breaks from screens often provide relief. Persistent dryness should be evaluated by an eye care professional, as untreated dry eye can damage the eye's surface.

While these changes are usually manageable, aging also increases the risk of serious eye diseases that can threaten vision if ignored.

Cataracts are among the most widespread conditions affecting older adults. They occur when the eye's clear lens becomes cloudy, leading to blurred or dim vision, faded colours, and sensitivity to light. Cataracts develop slowly and may not be noticeable at first. Fortunately, modern cataract surgery is safe and highly effective, restoring vision in most cases.

Glaucoma is another major concern, often called the "silent thief of sight" because it can damage the optic nerve without early warning signs. Vision loss from glaucoma is permanent, but early detection and treatment can prevent progression. Regular eye exams are crucial, especially for people over 60 or those with a family history of the disease.

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) affects the central part of the retina responsible for sharp, detailed vision. It can make reading, recognising faces, and driving difficult. Although some forms cannot be cured, lifestyle changes such as quitting smoking, eating a diet rich in leafy greens and fish, and managing blood pressure may slow its progression.

Diabetic retinopathy, a complication of diabetes, is another preventable cause of vision loss. High blood sugar damages the blood vessels in the retina. Managing diabetes through proper diet, medication, and regular monitoring can greatly reduce the risk.

Prevention plays a powerful role in preserving vision. Regular comprehensive eye examinations are the single most important step. Many eye diseases develop without noticeable symptoms in the early stages, making routine checkups essential even when vision seems fine.

Healthy lifestyle choices also protect eye health. A balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins A, C, and E supports the eyes. Wearing sunglasses that block ultraviolet (UV) rays protects against sun damage, particularly in bright, tropical regions.

Avoiding smoking is critical, as tobacco use significantly increases the risk of cataracts and macular degeneration.

Limiting screen time and following the 20-20-20 rule every 20 minutes, look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds helps reduce eye strain in today's digital world. Staying physically active and controlling conditions such as high blood pressure and cholesterol also contribute to longterm eye health.

Vision changes with age may be inevitable, but blindness and severe vision loss often are not. With awareness, preventive care, and timely treatment, most people can maintain good vision well into their later years.

Our eyes connect us to the world to loved ones' faces, to books and learning, to the beauty of nature. Protecting them is not just a medical responsibility but a lifelong investment in independence and quality of life. As the saying goes, growing older is unavoidable, but losing sight doesn't have to be. Regular checkups, healthy habits, and prompt attention to vision changes can ensure that the gift of sight remains clear for years to come.

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