



HEALTHY AGEING EYES

Simple steps you can take now to protect
your vision for the future.

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CENTRE FOR
Eye Research
Australia

Vision for the future

As we get older, our eyes go through some changes. Many cases of vision loss can be prevented or treated if caught early enough, so looking after your sight and having regular check-ups is important.

This guide gives you a snapshot of the major ageing eye diseases you need to know about – along with simple lifestyle tips that can help you reduce your risk.

The Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) is Australia's leading eye health research institute. Our mission is to save sight and change lives through world-class research.

This guide contains general information relating to various ageing eye diseases and is intended for informational purposes only. This information is not intended to be used as medical advice and does not guarantee any outcomes. Please do not use this information for diagnosing or self-treating any health or medical-related condition as this information is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. If you think you may have a medical condition or emergency, please immediately consult a medical or health care professional for assistance





Image: Anna Carlile

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

The macula is a tiny but important part of the retina, at the back of the eye. It's full of light-sensitive cells that are responsible for our sharp central vision.

"One in seven people over the age of 50 develops early signs of AMD."

In age-related macular degeneration (AMD), these cells gradually deteriorate. This can lead to blurred central vision, making it difficult to read, drive and recognise faces.

One in seven people over the age of 50 develops early signs of AMD. There are often no symptoms until the disease advances, so routine eye checks are important.

There are two main forms of late-stage AMD – dry and wet. Dry AMD develops slowly and there is currently no treatment. Wet AMD can cause sudden vision loss, but if caught early enough it can be treated with injections that can stabilise or improve vision.



Glaucoma

Glaucoma affects the optic nerve, which connects the eye to the brain. If left untreated, it can lead to vision loss and eventual blindness.

One in 10 people over the age of 80 has glaucoma. Family history of glaucoma, high eye pressure and eye injuries can all increase your risk.

Glaucoma typically progresses slowly and can often go unnoticed until vision loss is advanced, so regular eye checks are vital. Early treatment can prevent vision loss, but it can't repair damage. Common treatments include eye-drop medications, laser or surgery, all of which are aimed at lowering the pressure in the eye.



Diabetic retinopathy (DR)

People with diabetes (types 1 and 2) are at risk of diabetic eye disease. The most common form is diabetic retinopathy (DR), which damages the tiny blood vessels of the retina, the back of the eye.

Most vision loss from DR can be prevented, as long as it's caught early enough. However, there are often no symptoms until the disease is in its advanced stages – so regular eye checks are essential.

If you have diabetes, it's important to let your eye care professional know. You should have a diabetes eye check when you're first diagnosed with diabetes, and then at least every two years. Your eye doctor will recommend a check-up schedule that's best for you, as more frequent checks are needed by those at higher risk of vision loss.

Sign up at keepsight.org.au to get free reminders when it's time for an eye check.

“There are often no symptoms until the disease has advanced – so regular eye checks are essential.”

Want to know more?

 [KEEPSIGHT.ORG.AU](https://keepsight.org.au)

 [DIABETESAUSTRALIA.COM.AU](https://diabetesaustralia.com.au)

 [VISION2020AUSTRALIA.ORG.AU](https://vision2020australia.org.au)



Cataracts

A cataract is a clouding of the lens of the eye, causing blurred vision and sensitivity to light. Most cataracts develop during adulthood and almost everyone will develop some degree of cataracts by the age of 80.

Family history, sun exposure, smoking and diabetes can increase your risk of cataracts and the likelihood of developing them at a younger age. Long-term use of certain medications, eye trauma and some types of eye surgery can also increase your risk.

Cataracts are commonly removed with surgery, and vision recovery is generally quick. Your eye doctor will advise if surgery could be a good option for you.

"Cataracts are commonly removed with surgery, and vision recovery is generally quick."

INCREASED RISKS



Family history



Sun exposure



Smoking



Diabetes

Lifestyle tips for healthy ageing eyes

Simple lifestyle changes can reduce your risk of vision loss from many eye diseases. The good news is, many of these things are also beneficial for your general health and wellbeing – from your weight, to your heart, to your mental health.

Here are a few steps you can take now to give yourself the best chance of protecting your sight for the future.





Image: Anna Carlile

Get regular eye health checks

Having your eyes checked by an optometrist or ophthalmologist at least every two years should be an essential part of your health care routine.

Some people may need to have checks more often – your eye care provider will recommend what’s best for you.

Most blindness and vision loss from eye disease is preventable if it's caught early enough. However, you may not have any symptoms until the disease has advanced, so routine eye checks are vital.

"An eye health check usually only takes around 30 minutes, and it's often bulk billed to Medicare."

An eye health check usually only takes around 30 minutes, and it's often bulk billed to Medicare, so check with your eye care provider if this is the case.



Eat a healthy diet

Good health relies on a healthy, balanced diet. A few foods that may potentially support your eye health include:



Brightly coloured fruits and vegetables.

These will give you a good mix of nutrients, particularly vitamins A and C.



Dark leafy greens.

Leaves like spinach, kale and silverbeet are packed with antioxidants, especially lutein and zeaxanthin, which are important for your eyes.



Omega-3 fatty acids.

Healthy fats found in oily fish (like salmon, mackerel and trout), nuts, seeds and avocado can support your eye health.

Your GP, a nutritionist or a dietitian can help you develop a healthy eating plan.



Exercise

Protecting your vision is one more good reason to stay active at any age.

Many eye conditions are linked to health problems like diabetes, high blood pressure or high cholesterol, so helping to manage these through exercise may benefit your eyes too. CERA research also suggests exercise may have direct protective effects for the optic nerve and retina.

“Start at a level that’s manageable for you, and gradually build up. Talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise routine.”

Try to be physically active for at least 30 minutes each day. This could include things like brisk walking, swimming, tai chi, yoga, cycling, resistance exercises, tennis, bowls – or even everyday activities like gardening.

Start at a level that’s manageable for you, and gradually build up. If you have vision problems, you will need to be careful of falls. Talk to your doctor before starting any new exercise routine, especially if you have existing health or vision problems.



Quit smoking

Smoking significantly increases your risk of eye disease. The sooner you quit smoking, the better for your vision.

Quitting smoking is not easy, but there is a lot of support available to help you – from free Quitline counselling to nicotine replacement therapy including patches, sprays and gum.

For help quitting smoking, talk to your doctor, call Quitline on **137 848** or visit quit.org.au

Want to know more?

 quit.org.au





Protect your eyes from sun damage

Just like your skin, your eyes are vulnerable to damage from the sun's UV rays. Too much exposure to UV light over time is a risk factor for cataracts.

“Choose sunglasses labelled with a lens category of 2, 3 or 4 or an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) rating of 9 or 10.”

Sun protection is especially important when you're around water or snow, as the reflected light increases the potential for damage.

The good news is wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses that meet the Australian Standards can block up to 98% of UV radiation. Choose sunglasses labelled with a lens category of 2, 3 or 4, or an Eye Protection Factor (EPF) rating of 9 or 10.

However, if you have AMD these lenses may be too dark for you to see clearly. Talk to your eye healthcare provider about the best choices for you.



Monitor your vision at home

If you notice any major changes to your vision, don't wait for your routine eye check.

Symptoms like blurry or dim vision (that isn't improved by prescription glasses), sudden onset of flashes and many small floaters, pain, or profound sensitivity to light and glare should be checked promptly.

If you have AMD, you can monitor your vision with a simple test called an Amsler grid – a grid of black lines on a piece of paper.

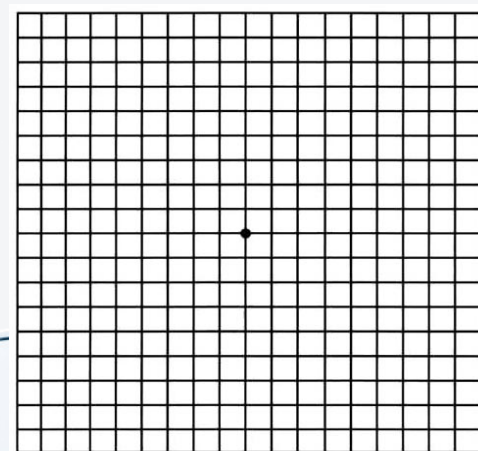
Once a week, cover one eye and look at the grid with the other, then swap. Changes in vision that affect one eye can often go unnoticed, so it's important to regularly check that you can see clearly with each eye, one at a time.

If you notice any significant vision changes – like wavy, distorted or blurred lines, or dark areas or 'holes' in the grid – see your eye care provider. An urgent review is needed if you experience sudden or very noticeable changes in your vision.

"If you have AMD, you can monitor your vision at home using a simple test called an Amsler grid."

[Download an Amsler grid](#) to print at home.

 Example of Amsler grid



About CERA

The Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) is an international leader in eye research with real-world impact.

We are an independent medical research institute closely affiliated with the University of Melbourne and co-located with the discipline of Ophthalmology in the Department of Surgery, Melbourne Medical School at the Royal Victorian Eye and Ear Hospital.

Our researchers are working to understand the causes of eye disease, to inform disease prevention and to improve the diagnosis and treatment of disease. Together we aim to save and restore sight.

Getting involved in research

By taking part in clinical research, you can play an important role in the future of eye health.

The Clinical Trials Research Centre at CERA conducts clinical studies for a variety of eye conditions including diabetic eye disease, age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, uveitis and other retinal diseases.

CLINICAL STUDIES



Diabetic eye disease



Age-related macular degeneration



Glaucoma



Retinal diseases



And other eye conditions

To find out more about clinical trials at CERA and register your interest online, visit cera.org.au



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CERA researchers sincerely appreciate the generosity of our community of supporters. Your donation, no matter how big or small, will help us continue our sight saving research.

If you wish to make a donation or to learn more about our research, please visit cera.org.au or call us on 1300 737 757.



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