



YOUR EYES: THE CLEAR PICTURE

Even if you've always had 20/20 vision, time and habits can leave you squinting. Protecting your peepers means separating fact from fiction, so we've debunked five common myths.

MYTH

You only need to see an eye doctor if you're having vision troubles.

TRUTH

From age 18 to 40 you should get an eye exam about every five years—more often if you have vision issues, a family history of eye disease or diabetes, or high blood pressure. At age 40, you should get an exam that includes eye dilation. After that, have eye exams every two to four years then annually when you hit 55. Dilating your eyes enables the doctor to examine your eyes for signs of disease. "The eye is like a house with two rooms, and everything you see in the mirror is the foyer," says

Rebecca J. Taylor, M.D., clinical spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology. "Dilating expands the pupil, which is like a tiny keyhole, so a doctor can open the door and look at the great room of the eye where so many of the blinding eye diseases occur."

Diseases like glaucoma and macular degeneration rarely cause symptoms until they've advanced, but if you catch them early, they're usually treatable.

MYTH

If you start wearing reading glasses, you'll become reliant on them.

TRUTH

Near vision diminishes for everyone at some point after age 40. Readers prevent eye strain, not changes in your eyes, so go ahead and wear them. "You don't get more dependent on the glasses; you see better," Taylor says.

IN FOCUS

159
MILLION

Americans—about two out of three—wear prescription eyeglasses.

45
MILLION

Americans wear contact lenses. If you're one of them, be sure to change the solution daily and never sleep with your lenses in.



MYTH
Floaters are always normal

TRUTH Floaters—spots or shadows that appear to move across your field of vision—can be harmless. But they can sometimes be a sign of retinal detachment, so if you're suddenly seeing floaters, call your eye doctor ASAP, especially if you're also seeing flashes of light.

In general, floaters develop because the gel inside your eye starts to partially liquefy, says Laura Sperazza, O.D., director of low vision services at Lighthouse Guild in NYC. That process tends to increase as you get older, which is why floaters are

more common after 50. You're also more likely to experience floaters if you have diabetes or high blood pressure, but good health habits can help minimize them. Over time, floaters tend to shrink or sink to the bottom of the eye so they're less noticeable.

MYTH
It's normal for your peripheral vision to shrink as you age.

TRUTH Though it's common to have trouble seeing up close as you get older (because the eye lens becomes less able to change shape to shift focus from far to near), it's not normal for your peripheral vision to change. If your side vision has become more limited or things in the distance have gotten blurrier, see your eye doctor to find out what's going on; it could be a sign of glaucoma.

MYTH
Eyes that tear up often can't be dry.

TRUTH If your eyes water a lot, it's because they're trying to compensate for a decrease in normal tear production. You have three types of tears: basal, which keep your eyes lubricated; reflex, which wash away irritants; and emotional, which happen when you're sad or happy. As you age—especially during menopause—basal tear production may decrease, causing a common condition called dry eye. Certain meds (including antihistamines, antidepressants, blood pressure drugs, and decongestants) can also dry basal tears. To make up for the loss, eyes produce more reflex tears, but they don't moisturize as well.

To treat dry eye, use OTC artificial tears several times a day, Sperazza says. Also remind yourself to blink periodically when you're staring at a screen for a while, and stay hydrated.

[BEST PRACTICES]

TOP WAYS TO KEEP YOUR EYES HEALTHY

1

WEAR SHADES

UV rays can lead to cataracts, eyelid skin cancers, even melanoma in and around the eye.

Look for wrap-around sunglasses with 100-percent UVA/UVB protection.

2

EAT COLORFULLY

Leafy greens are great sources of lutein and zeaxanthin, two antioxidants that help protect vision. Vitamin C-rich fruits (oranges, grapefruit, etc.) are also good, as are beta-carotene-rich carrots.

3

DON'T SMOKE

It damages the blood vessels in the eyes and puts you at risk for macular degeneration, the leading cause of blindness after age 60 in the U.S. ■

