

You can look after your eyes by having regular eye tests and taking simple precautions to protect yourself. More than half of all sight loss can be prevented with the right safety measures and a healthy lifestyle. You should always wear glasses



Regular eye tests

Regular eye tests are important for two reasons. They tell you if you need your vision corrected or a new pair of glasses. They also help detect sight problems early on, which improves your chances of getting treatment. Many of these conditions will have no symptoms before they are detected in the eye test

Optometrists recommend that most people have an eye test every two years. People over 40 and people from black or minority ethnic (BME) groups may need sight tests more often.

[Click here to see who is eligible for free NHS eye examinations.](#)

What to do if you notice a change in your sight

Visit your optician or GP immediately if you're concerned about your eyesight at any time. Never dismiss changes in your sight as a normal part of getting older.

People at greater risk of eye disease

Anyone can develop sight problems, but some people are at greater risk. Regular eye tests are particularly important if you're:

- over 60 years old

- from a certain ethnic group – for example, people from African-Caribbean communities are at greater risk of glaucoma and diabetes, and people from south Asian communities are at a greater risk of diabetes (diabetic retinopathy, where the retina becomes damaged, is a common complication of diabetes)
- someone with a learning disability
- from a family with a history of eye disease



Eye problems in children

Children may show signs of poor eyesight without talking or complaining about it. Look out for the following signs of possible sight problems in your children:

- sitting close to the TV
- holding objects very close to their face
- blinking a lot
- rubbing their eyes
- one eye turning in or out

If your child is having any sight problems, take them to an optometrist for further investigation.

Like adults, children should have eye checks around every two years.

Lifestyle choices to look after your eyes

Quit smoking

Smokers are much more likely than non-smokers to develop age-related macular degeneration and cataracts. Visit www.stopsmokingni.info to find out how you can get help to stop smoking, including a free Quit Kit.

Be active

Lack of exercise contributes significantly to several eye conditions, particularly among people aged 60 and over. Exercise may reduce the risk of sight loss from narrowing or hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure and diabetes. For tips on getting active visit www.choosetolivebetter.com

Eat healthily

A healthy, balanced diet that includes a wide variety of fruit and vegetables will benefit your overall health, and may help keep your retina healthy. Get tips on healthy eating at www.choosetolivebetter.com

Eye safety



In the sun

Protecting your eyes from the sun is very important. Never look directly at the sun, even when something exciting is happening, such as an eclipse. This can cause irreversible damage to your eyesight and even lead to blindness.

Always wear sunglasses with the CE mark, which ensures they are giving you the right level of ultraviolet (UV) protection. Wearing a wide-brimmed hat will also help. Visit www.careinthesun.org

In the garden

Many people get eye injuries while gardening, so it's important to protect your eyes. You can easily scratch your eyes on twigs, stems, branches or leaves. Any kind of glasses can protect your eyes in these cases, but safety goggles are the best option.

Many garden tools also pose a serious risk of eye injury. Mowers, strimmers and spades can make stones and grit fly into the air. Chainsaws pose an even greater risk as they can kick back into your face. It's very important to wear proper safety goggles or safety glasses when using any of this equipment.

If something does fly up and hit your eye at high speed, get it checked out as soon as possible.



Using computers

Working for long periods on a computer can cause:

- eye discomfort or pain
- headaches
- itchy eyes
- difficulty focusing

When working on a computer, you should:

- pause regularly and look away from the screen
- blink your eyes regularly
- take frequent short breaks
- stretch your head and neck

You should work in a room with good lighting but without light reflecting off the computer screen.

Remember to get your eyes tested regularly (every two years) if you work on a computer.

Using chemicals

Many everyday chemicals can cause severe damage to your eyes. These include bleach, weedkiller, fertilisers, caustic soda and oven cleaners. You also need to be careful with most household chemicals including laundry liquids and surface cleaners. Always store harmful chemicals away from small children.

If you get a chemical in your eye, you need to thoroughly wash it out as quickly as possible with cold water, eye wash or contact lens solution. In an emergency, tap water from the tap is fine. Tap water for a few seconds beforehand.



Doing DIY

DIY causes many eye injuries every year. You should always wear proper safety goggles or safety glasses that:

- have a polycarbonate lens
- have a CE mark
- fit properly (including over your glasses if you wear them)

If you get something in your eye, don't rub it. Pull your upper eyelid outwards and down over your lower eyelashes. This causes tears to flow, which should wash out your eye.

If that doesn't work, wash out your eye with cold water, eye wash or contact lens solution.

Doing sports

Many eye injuries are caused by moving objects and other factors during sports.

- **Golf** – Stand well behind anyone taking a shot to avoid being injured by a ball or club face.

- **Hurling** – Always wear a face guard to avoid serious injury from a sliotar or hurl. It will also protect you against your opponents' arms
- **Swimming** – Never wear contact lenses while swimming. Wear goggles to protect your eyes if they're sensitive.
- **Cycling** – Wear protective glasses to avoid injury from road chippings and to stop flies and dust getting into your eyes.
- **Squash or handball** – These balls are particularly dangerous because they're a similar size to your eyeball. You also risk being hit in the eye with a squash racquet. Wear sports safety glasses or goggles while playing.
- **Guns and paintballing** – Air rifles, BB guns, nerf guns and paintballs regularly cause severe eye injuries. Always wear safety goggles when using them.

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