

Seeing Clearly: Eye Care Essentials for Women

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Refractive Errors

Myopia (Nearsightedness) – Distant objects appear blurry, while close objects are clear.

Hyperopia (Farsightedness) – Close objects appear blurry, while distant objects are clearer.

Astigmatism – Blurred or distorted vision at all distances due to an irregularly shaped cornea or lens.

Presbyopia – Age-related loss of near focusing ability, usually affecting people over 40.

Causes: Genetics, eye shape abnormalities, aging (for presbyopia)

Symptoms: Blurred vision, eye strain, headaches, difficulty seeing at certain distances

Treatment: Eyeglasses, contact lenses, refractive Surgery (LASIK, PRK, etc.)

Dry Eye Syndrome

Dry Eye Syndrome (DES) occurs when the eyes do not produce enough tears or when tears evaporate too quickly, leading to discomfort and vision problems. It is a common condition, especially among older adults and women.

Women are 2 to 3 times more likely to develop dry eye syndrome than men due to hormonal changes during pregnancy, menopause, and the use of birth control contribute to this higher risk.

Causes: Hormonal changes (menopause, pregnancy, birth control), aging (tear production decreases with age), environmental factors (wind, smoke, dry climates, screen time), medical conditions (autoimmune diseases like Sjögren's syndrome, rheumatoid arthritis), medications (antihistamines, antidepressants, birth control), contact lens use

Symptoms: Burning or stinging sensation, redness and irritation, blurry vision, sensitivity to light, feeling of something in the eye (gritty sensation), watery eyes (as a reflex response to dryness)

Treatment & Management: Artificial tears (lubricating eye drops), prescription eye drops (Restasis, Xiidra) warm compresses & eyelid hygiene (for better oil gland function) omega-3 supplements (help improve tear quality) limiting screen time (frequent blinking to reduce strain) using a humidifier (adds moisture to dry indoor air)

Cataracts

Cataracts occur when the eye's natural lens becomes cloudy, leading to blurred vision. It is a common age-related condition but can also result from other factors.

Women are more likely to develop cataracts, especially later in life due to longer life expectancy and higher susceptibility to conditions like diabetes and UV damage.

Causes & Risk Factors: Aging (most common cause), UV exposure (prolonged sun exposure without protection), diabetes (higher risk of early cataracts), smoking & alcohol use, eye injury or surgery, certain medications (e.g., corticosteroids), genetic predisposition

Symptoms: Blurred or cloudy vision, sensitivity to light and glare, difficulty seeing at night, fading or yellowing of colors, frequent prescription changes in glasses or contacts, seeing halos around lights

Treatment: Early stages: Improved lighting, updated eyeglasses, anti-glare lenses, advanced cases: Cataract surgery (removal of cloudy lens and replacement with an artificial lens)

Prevention & Eye Care: Wear UV-protective sunglasses, maintain a healthy diet (rich in antioxidants, vitamins C & E), quit smoking & limit alcohol, regular eye check-ups for early detection

Age-related Macular Degeneration

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is a progressive eye disease that affects the macula, the central part of the retina, leading to vision loss in the center of the visual field. It is a leading cause of blindness in older adults.

Women are more likely to develop AMD than men, particularly in those over 75, because women tend to live longer and have higher rates of conditions like hypertension, which increase the risk of AMD. In the U.S., women account for 65-70% of AMD cases.

Types of AMD:

Dry AMD (Most Common, 80-90%) – Slow progression due to the thinning of the macula and the buildup of drusen (yellow deposits).

Wet AMD (More Severe, 10-20%) – Faster vision loss due to abnormal blood vessel growth under the retina, leading to leakage and scarring.

Cause & Risk Factors: Aging (risk increases after 50) genetics & family history, smoking (doubles the risk), high blood pressure & cardiovascular disease, obesity & poor diet (low in antioxidants and omega-3s), excessive UV exposure

Symptoms: Blurred or distorted central vision, difficulty reading or recognizing faces, dark or blank spots in vision, colors appearing dull or less vibrant

Treatment & Management: For dry AMD: No cure, but progression can be slowed with: Antioxidant-rich diet (leafy greens, fish, nuts) AREDS2 supplements (zinc, vitamin C, vitamin E, lutein, zeaxanthin) UV protection & quitting smoking. For Wet AMD: Anti-VEGF injections (Lucentis, Eylea, Avastin) to stop abnormal blood vessel growth, laser therapy (less common)

Prevention: Maintain a healthy diet (rich in omega-3s, lutein, and zeaxanthin), quit smoking, regular eye exams for early detection

Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a group of eye diseases that damage the optic nerve, often due to high intraocular pressure (IOP). It can lead to permanent vision loss if untreated. Glaucoma is often called the "silent thief of sight" because it can progress without noticeable symptoms.

Women are more likely to develop glaucoma, especially after the age of 60, due to hormonal changes and longer life expectancy contribute. Women are more prone to developing normal-tension glaucoma.

Types of Glaucoma: Open-Angle Glaucoma (Most Common) – Gradual blockage of drainage canals leads to increased eye pressure. Progresses slowly without early symptoms. Angle-Closure Glaucoma – A sudden blockage in drainage canals causes a rapid rise in eye pressure, leading to an emergency. Normal-Tension Glaucoma – Optic nerve damage occurs despite normal eye pressure.

Causes & Risk Factors: Increased eye pressure (IOP) age (risk increases after 40), family history (genetic predisposition) African, Hispanic, or Asian descent (higher risk), diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease, long-term corticosteroid use

Symptoms: Open-Angle Glaucoma: no early symptoms, gradual loss of peripheral (side) vision, tunnel vision in advanced stages

Angle-Closure Glaucoma (Emergency): Sudden eye pain, severe headache, blurred vision & halos around lights, nausea & vomiting

Treatment & Management: Medicated eye drops (reduce eye pressure), Laser therapy (improves fluid drainage) surgery (creates a new drainage pathway)

Prevention & Eye Care: Regular eye exams (early detection is crucial), control blood pressure & diabetes, protect eyes from injury, avoid prolonged steroid use unless necessary

Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetic Retinopathy (DR) is an eye disease caused by high blood sugar levels damaging the blood vessels in the retina. It is a leading cause of vision loss in people with diabetes.

Stages of Diabetic Retinopathy: Non-Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy (NPDR) – Early stage with mild to moderate damage; may have no symptoms. Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy (PDR) – Advanced stage with abnormal blood vessel growth, leading to bleeding, scarring, and potential blindness.

Causes & Risk Factors: Uncontrolled diabetes (both type 1 & type 2), high blood sugar levels (damages retinal blood vessels), high blood pressure & high cholesterol, smoking, pregnancy (gestational diabetes increases risk), long duration of diabetes (risk increases over time)

Symptoms: Blurred or fluctuating vision, dark spots or floaters, poor night vision loss in advanced cases

Treatment & Management: Blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol control, anti-VEGF injections (Lucentis, Eylea, Avastin) to reduce abnormal blood vessel growth, laser therapy (photocoagulation) to seal leaking vessels, vitrectomy surgery for severe bleeding

Prevention & Eye Care: regular dilated eye exams (at least once a year), healthy diet & exercise, quitting smoking, tight blood sugar control (Hg A1C below 7%)

Retinal Detachment or Tear

Retinal Detachment is a serious eye condition where the retina (the light-sensitive layer at the back of the eye) pulls away from its normal position, leading to vision loss. Retinal tears occur when a small break or hole develops in the retina, which can progress into detachment if untreated.

Causes & Risk Factors: Aging (natural changes in the eye's vitreous gel) severe myopia (nearsightedness), eye injury or trauma, previous eye surgery (e.g., cataract surgery), family history or genetic predisposition, diabetic retinopathy or other retinal conditions, inflammation or diseases affecting the retina

Symptoms: Sudden vision changes: Flashing lights or the appearance of floaters, shadow or curtain-like effect: A sense of a dark area or “curtain” blocking part of the visual field, blurred or distorted vision, loss of peripheral vision

Treatment & Management: Laser therapy or cryotherapy (to seal retinal tears and prevent detachment) vitrectomy (removal of the vitreous gel and repair of the retina) scleral buckle surgery (a band is placed

around the eye to reattach the retina), pneumatic retinopexy (involves injecting a gas bubble into the eye to help the retina reattach)

Prevention & Eye Care: Regular eye exams, especially if at higher risk, prompt treatment of retinal tears to prevent detachment, protecting eyes from trauma (e.g., wearing safety glasses), monitoring changes in vision, particularly in those with high myopia or diabetes

Inflammatory Eye Diseases

Eye Inflammatory Diseases refer to conditions where the eye becomes inflamed due to infection, injury, or autoimmune response. These conditions can affect various parts of the eye, leading to discomfort, pain, and vision problems.

Common Types of Eye Inflammatory Diseases: Uveitis - Inflammation of the uvea, the middle layer of the eye. Keratitis - Inflammation of the cornea, often due to infection (bacteria, viral, or fungal) or injury. Scleritis - inflammation of the sclera (the white part of the eye). Optic Neuritis - Inflammation of the optic nerve, often linked to multiple sclerosis or infections. Blepharitis - Inflammation of the eyelids, often caused by bacterial infection or skin conditions like rosacea.

Autoimmune disorders affect women at a higher rate than men, thus, women are higher risk for developing inflammatory eye diseases due to autoimmune problems.

Cause & Risk Factors: Autoimmune diseases (e.g., rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis, sarcoidosis, thyroid eye disease, psoriatic arthritis) trauma or injury to the eye

Symptoms: redness and swelling of the eye or eyelids, pain or sensitivity to light, blurred vision or vision loss, watery eyes or discharge, increased pressure in the eye, flashes and floaters

Treatment & Management: Steroid eye drops or oral steroids (to reduce inflammation), Immunosuppressive drugs (for autoimmune-related inflammation), Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs,

Prevention & Eye Care: Regular eye check-ups for early detection of inflammatory conditions, managing underlying health conditions (e.g., diabetes, autoimmune diseases)

Pregnancy Related Eye Problems

- Dry eyes
- Blurred vision fluid retention can change the shape of the cornea
- Changes in prescription (refractive changes)
- Increased sensitivity to light due to hormonal changes
- Puffy eyelids and swelling
- Migraine-related visual disturbances
- Preeclampsia and eclampsia - blurred vision, flashing lights, temporary vision loss, double vision
- Gestational diabetes
- Central serous retinopathy (CSR)
- Worsening preexisting eye conditions- diabetes, glaucoma, or uveitis