



Generation Eye

*A National Eye Health Week
report on multi-generational
attitudes to eye care in Britain and
the impact this could have on
future sight loss.*

in partnership with



Transforming eye health



**NATIONAL EYE
HEALTH WEEK**
MONDAY 19 – SUNDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2016
YOUR VISION MATTERS



“Millions of people are putting their health at risk by not having regular eye tests”

The **Generation Eye** report published by Eye Health UK in partnership with Specsavers examines the effect deteriorating vision has on people’s wellbeing and the lifestyle factors that influence poor eye health.

It also questions what people are doing to protect their vision and eye health.

When we asked people about how they looked after their eyes we found that almost 14 million (13.8) adults in the UK fail to have their eyes checked every two years as recommended by opticians – with many more making poor lifestyle choices that can adversely affect the health of their eyes.

Deteriorating sight was people’s main concern about growing older (55%), with falling ill second (50%) and losing hearing third (32%).

When asked which of their five senses they would least like to lose, eyesight was the overwhelming choice. More

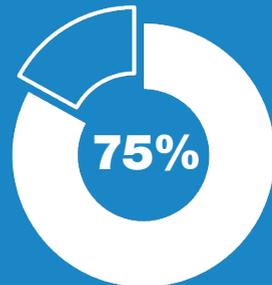
than four in five respondents (83%) named it as the sense that they would least like to lose for a myriad of reasons.

Yet, many people are suffering with poor eye health and needless sight loss that restricts their daily lives.

Three quarters of Brits (75%) admitted they had suffered poor eye health in the last 12 months and more than one in five (22%) said that this had restricted or impaired their daily life.

One thing is clear – eyesight is incredibly important.

UK Adults suffering poor eye health in last 12 months





Vision through the generations

One of the most startling outcomes of our research was how divided the generations are when it comes to their understanding and action regarding eye care.

We have identified three key groups that we feel could hold the key to understanding and addressing the state of the nation's eye health:

- 18 – 24 year olds
The **UnSeen Generation**
- Their parents 45 – 54 year olds
The **New Presbyopes**
- And their grandparents (over 65s)
The **Low Vision Generation**

The UnSeen Generation

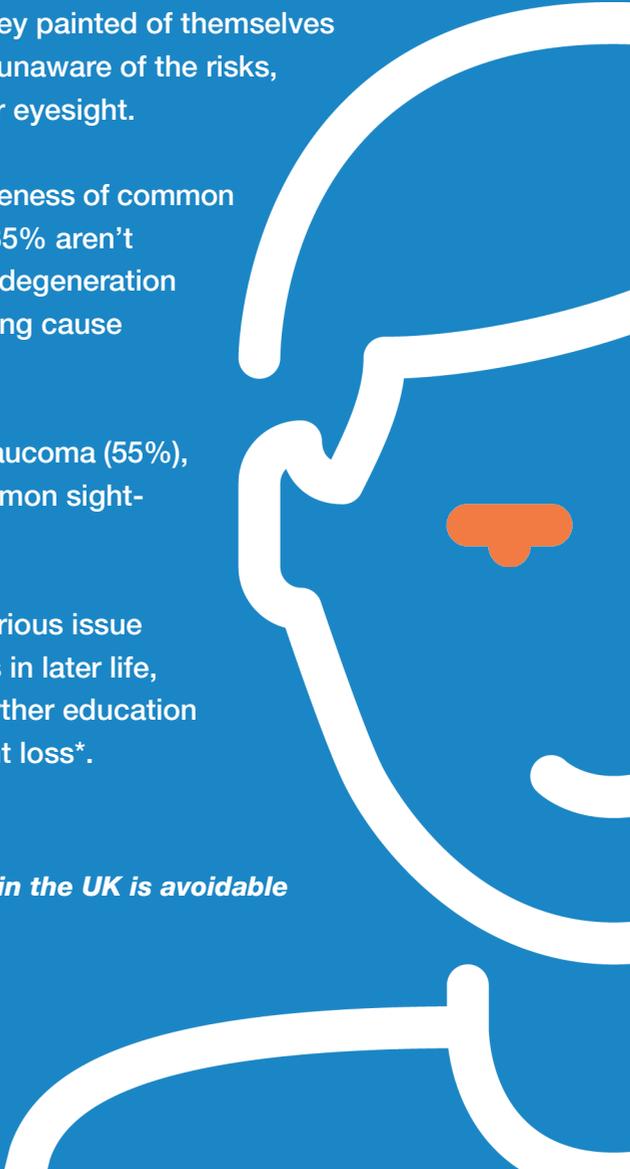
The youngest age group surveyed were also, in many ways, the most revealing. The picture they painted of themselves was one of a generation both unaware of the risks, and inactive in protecting their eyesight.

This group have very low awareness of common age-related eye conditions – 85% aren't aware of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which is the UK's leading cause of blindness.

Many were also unaware of glaucoma (55%), another of the UK's most common sight-threatening eye diseases.

This lack of awareness is a serious issue that could have repercussions in later life, and highlights the need for further education to help prevent avoidable sight loss*.

*** More than 50% of sight loss in the UK is avoidable**
[Access Economics, 2009]





Our research clearly highlighted an urgent need to increase young adults' awareness of how lifestyle factors – including missing an eye test, eating unhealthily and smoking – can lead to poor eye health.

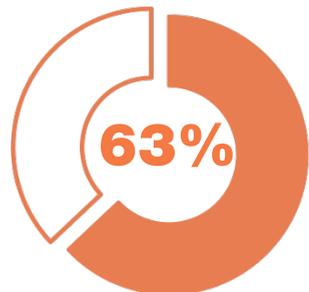
Smoking

In 2014, the Office of National Statistics found that around a quarter (23%) of our UnSeen Generation were smokers. However, the number of young adults who are aware that smoking can damage eye health is only one in 20 (5%).

Studies show that a person who smokes is up to four times more likely to develop AMD than a non-smoker, but this generation has little awareness of the disease, or that they are putting themselves in harm's way.

Promisingly however, our research did show that two thirds (63%) of 18 – 24 year olds who smoke would be encouraged to quit if they knew it put their sight at risk, further illustrating the need for more eye health education.

**% of Young Adult Smokers
who would be encouraged to
quit if they knew smoking put
their sight at risk**





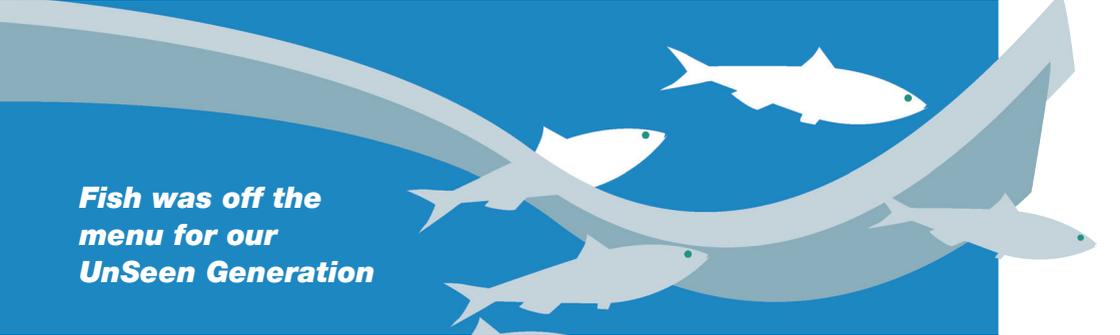
Food for thought

Another key lifestyle factor that can affect eye health is diet but none of the UnSeen Generation ate a healthy diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables and a serving of fish at least once a week that is recommended for eye health.

More than a third (36%) admitted that they eat fewer than two portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

What makes this group so key in combating eye health issues is that by instilling good habits from an early age, the foundations can be laid for a dramatic reduction in sight loss for generations to come, preventing needless suffering for millions and encouraging longer, happier lives.

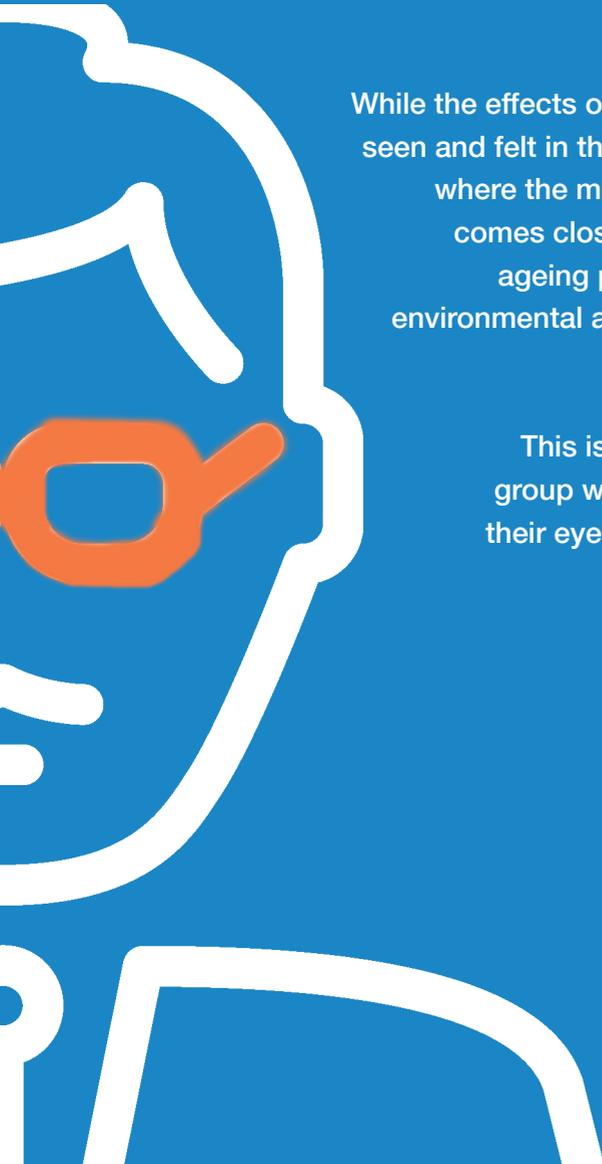
Fish was off the menu for our UnSeen Generation



New Presbyopes (45-54 year-olds)

While the effects of poor quality eye health can be seen and felt in the early stages of life, the period where the most dramatic deterioration often comes closer to middle age, as the natural ageing process and several decades of environmental and behavioural factors begin to make themselves felt.

This is very apparent in the 45-54 age group with one in five (20%) saying that their eye health is so bad that it restricts their daily lives.





Vanity?

Our research revealed that this group were particularly worried about the visual affects of ageing, with almost one in three (30%) worried about losing their teeth, one in five concerned about putting on weight and one in seven fretting about wrinkles.

Incredibly, 80% of New Presbyopes had experienced problems with their eye health in the last year, posting the highest figures for tired eyes (37%). They also experienced the most problems with close-up vision (45%) of any age range.

A fifth of these respondents have trouble seeing characters when texting (21%), a quarter have to hold their arms out when trying to read (25%) and 41% frequently turn the lights on so that they can see more clearly.

These are all classic symptoms of presbyopia, a condition that affects most people from their mid-forties, but one that only a quarter (26%) of our New Presbyopes had heard of.

A fifth of New Presbyopes have trouble seeing characters when texting





Screen fatigue

Around six in ten (58%) middle-aged respondents say that working at a computer screen causes their eyes to tire. Yet following a simple 20-20-20 rule – look away from your screen every 20 minutes, for 20 seconds and focus on objects 20 feet away – could help minimise the risks of fatigue when working at a screen.

Real and present danger

A quarter of New Presbyopes struggle to read food labels (25%). A further fifth can not read medicine bottles and almost a third struggle to read small print on instructions and guarantees (31%).

These worrying statistics present a potential for further danger beyond sight loss.

One misread dosage on the side of a bottle of pills can lead to a serious health issue. One missed line on a contract or instruction document could lead to unexpected financial loss. This further illustrates the broader effects that poor eye health can have on many aspects of life.

Regular sight tests and information about presbyopia could make a big difference to the daily lives of New Presbyopes.

The Low Vision Generation (over-65s)

Although this generation is most likely to have their eyes checked regularly, millions are missing out on free eye tests (paid for by the NHS) that could help them maintain full and independent lives for longer.

The NHS' General Ophthalmic Service (GOS) figures reveal that the number of eye tests conducted among the over-60s has steadily declined over recent years.





Coming home to roost

Research shows that a quarter (27%) of people over 75, who experience visual impairment, may simply need a new prescription for their glasses or contact lenses. A further 27% have cataracts that could be treated**.

Poor vision is a major contributory factor of falls in the over-60s. Falls are a common cause of injury with around one in three adults over 65 who live at home having at least one fall a year, and about half of these will experience falls even more frequently.

According to the National Health Service, in the UK, falls are the most common cause of injury-related deaths in people over the age of 75, which renders regular eye checks and up-to-date prescriptions as important in later life as at any other time.

With the average UK life expectancy now above 80, and the bad habits and care levels of the UnSeen Generation and New Presbyopes compounding potential future problems, there is even more need for people to protect their eye health and vision.

*** Wormald RP, Wright LA, Courtney P et al.*



Eye health advice

Here are eight important steps we should all be taking to help keep our eyes and vision healthy.

Eye Tests



Three in ten Brits have not had an eye test within the last two years (28%).

Eye tests are vital for detecting potential eye health issues and are free for many people on the NHS

Wear Sunglasses

Cumulative UV exposure can increase your risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration.



When choosing sunglasses make sure that they are safe as well as stylish! Look out for the CE, UV 400 or British Standard marks – this ensures they provide a safe level of protection from the sun.

Eat Properly

Foods high in eye-friendly nutrients, such as lutein, zeaxanthin, Vitamins A, B6, C, E and Zinc can have a significant influence on maintaining healthy eyes.



These include citrus fruits, omega-rich oily fish, eggs, nuts, seeds and leafy green vegetables.

Exercise



Taking regular exercise could reduce the risk of sight loss from narrowing or hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Quit Smoking



Smoking contributes to many eye health issues.

Smokers are up to four times more likely to lose their sight than non-smokers. It also causes dry eye syndrome, uveitis and impair your colour vision.

Watch your Weight



More than half of all British adults are overweight however maintaining a healthy weight helps preserve macula pigment density, which can prevent the onset of macular degeneration – the UK's leading cause of sight loss.

Go Outdoors

Research has shown that spending time playing outdoors, can be beneficial in helping to prevent the onset and progression of myopia (short-sightedness) in children. So make sure your kids get out and get active every day.



Be Screensmart



Working at a computer won't harm your eyes but, sitting staring at a screen for long periods can cause 'screen fatigue' – sore, itchy or tired eyes; headaches; impaired colour perception and temporary blurring.



Let's be active, not reactive

Vision matters. It's the sense that allows people to fully understand the world around them, the one which defines how we form the memories we cherish and, as our research shows, it is the one which people treasure the most.

This National Eye Health Week, the message is clear: people throughout the UK, of all backgrounds, age groups and genders, need to recognise that vision is precious and fragile, and the risks to it need to be recognised, understood and addressed.

If we as a society are proactive, rather than reactive in tackling these problems, we can lay the foundations for future generations to live without fear of their eyesight deteriorating unnecessarily.

This is what we are working tirelessly to achieve, and it is what we will continue to strive for years to come.

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