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National Eye Health Week

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RNIB

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Transforming eye health

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Modern Living
and how it could be
impacting your health

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Karen Osborn IGA
discusses stopping
glaucoma in its tracks

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Six major myths
that may ruin your
sight

ONLINE

UK's eye health out of focus

Our sight is precious. You only have to close your eyes for a moment to appreciate how important your vision and eye health is. And, for 78 per cent of us, sight is the sense we'd least like to lose.

Yet, in Britain today a million people are living with avoidable sight loss and Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) estimates this number could rise by a third by 2030. Here, David Cartwright, Chair of National Eye Health Week (18 – 24 September) highlights some of the steps we should all be taking to reverse this trend in avoidable sight loss.

Essential eye checks

Failing to have regular eye tests, once every two years unless advised otherwise by your optometrist, is probably the biggest threat to our eye health. Almost 14 million Brits (13.8 million) don't have

regular eye tests despite them being essential health checks.

Not only can an eye test detect eye conditions, such as glaucoma, years before you notice a change in your vision, they can also uncover signs of general health problems including diabetes and hypertension.

The worrying truth is many of us only visit our optometrist when we are aware something is wrong and sadly this can mean the damage is already done.

National Eye Health Week seeks to change this by raising awareness of the need to take care of your eyes and make eye tests as much a part of your healthcare regime as having dental check-ups or smear tests.

A routine eye test takes around 30 minutes and for millions of us it's absolutely free – paid for either by the NHS or an employer.



David Cartwright

Chair of National Eye Health Week

“13.8 million Brits don't have regular eye tests”

Treating minor eye conditions

Your optometrist is also best placed for timely diagnosis and treatment of minor eye conditions. A new service currently being introduced in some areas, will see accredited optometrists offering NHS appointments for conditions like red eye, or flashes and floaters, helping to relieve pressure on GPs and A&E departments.

Lifestyle counts

Lifestyle choices pose another big threat to the nation's eye health. Your diet, weight, activity levels and alcohol consumption can all affect your eye health.

Protecting your eyes from the sun's UV rays and not smoking can also help keep your eyes and vision healthy.

Future vision

The Central Optical Fund (the body that supports optometry projects), Optical Confederation and College of Optometrists have published a landmark report predicting how technology could shape optometry and help to improve eye health over the next 15 years. There are also some important medical developments on the horizon for the further million people whose sight loss is currently unavoidable as the charity, Fight for Sight, funds vital research into causes of sight loss. ■



For more information about National Eye Health Week and caring for your eyes go to visionmatters.org.uk or visit your local optician.

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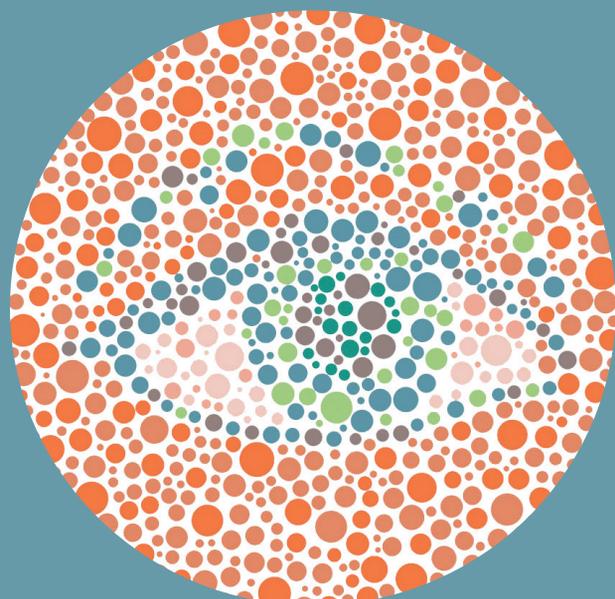


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1 IN 12 MEN ARE COLOUR BLIND. ASK YOUR OPTOMETRIST FOR A COLOUR VISION TEST IF YOU THINK YOU OR YOUR CHILD MAY BE AFFECTED

www.visionmatters.org.uk for more information

Source : NHS Choices 1 in 12 men has red-green colour vision deficiency.



NATIONAL EYE HEALTH WEEK
MONDAY 18 – SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2017
YOUR VISION MATTERS



COLUMN

If your eyes matter get an eye test today

By Ailsa Colquhoun

Many people still put their eyesight at risk by failing to attend regular check-ups. A new report explains how governments and services must start working together to put this right.

In a recent poll, 6,430 adults were asked why they had not been for an eye test in the past two years. Out of three possible responses, which do you think was the most common answer they gave?

- There's nothing wrong with my eyes
- No time for an eye test
- New glasses are too expensive

According to a new report from sight loss charity Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) and high street opticians, Specsavers, the top answer given (by 33 per cent of respondents) is a) that people think they can tell for themselves when there is anything wrong with their eyes. The next most popular answer (by 24 per cent) is b) a lack of time, followed by c) the cost of glasses, mentioned by 17 per cent.

In the report, *The State of the Nation Eye Health 2017: A Year in Review*, almost a quarter of respondents admitted that they could not see as well in the distance or close up as they used to, yet had not yet sought advice.

Commenting, RNIB Acting CEO, Sally Harvey, said: "The findings are very worrying. They show that people are waiting for signs of sight loss before visiting an optician. An optician can detect eye health problems or other medical issues at an early stage and before symptoms present, which we know is important if some potentially irreversible sight loss is to be avoided."



Sally Harvey

Acting Chief Executive,
Royal National Institute of Blind
People (RNIB)

Time perspective

Looking at the nation's second biggest concern – the time it takes to have an eye test – Dr Nigel Best, Clinical spokesperson for Specsavers encourages people to put this into perspective. An average eye test takes between 20-30 minutes, during which time you will receive a three-in-one check-up: an eye sight test, an eye health test – looking for signs of eye problems such as cataracts, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration – and a general health check, looking for signs in the eye of potentially silent but killer conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure. If you think how long you can spend discussing a new mobile phone contract (something you will also do typically every two years) or waiting at home for your boiler to be serviced (something you might do twice in two years) – compared to a 20-minute test that could save your life, then the decision becomes a bit of a 'no-brainer', Dr Best believes.

Concerned about cost

Tackling the cost question, Dr Best points out that an eye test costs on average of £20-25, or £10-12.50 a year

– which is far less than most people spend on coffee and snacks in an average week. Depending on where you live or your age, NHS eye tests can be free and if not, there can be financial support, including for glasses. Dr Best says: "Cost should not, and need not, be a barrier."

So what would make you admit there was something wrong with your eyes and book an eye test?

According to the RNIB/Specsavers report, most commonly people say it would be when reading became difficult (58 per cent) followed by problems reading a digital screen (46 per cent) or if they started to have headaches or tired eyes (45 per cent).

Although these are all good reasons for an eye test, the experts at the RNIB/Specsavers believe that all players in the eye care continuum – including Government and the UK's eye care service providers – have a part to play in making it as easy as possible for people to get the eye care services they need, when and where they need them.

Projections suggest that the number of people living with sight loss will increase to more than four million in 2050, as the UK population ages. And if UK eyecare services are to cope, things need to change. In conjunction with colleagues across the eye health and sight loss sectors, RNIB and Specsavers are committed to using their new report to direct policy makers to target services more effectively and encourage people to take up eye tests. Harvey says: "We hope it supports strategic thinking as we work together to transform eye health and take steps to stop people losing their sight unnecessarily." ■



Read more on
healthawareness.co.uk



Leon Paull

International Director,
OrCam

Eye tech is changing lives in sight loss

Sight loss does not have to mean loss of life quality. Daily problems are now being solved by technology. Every day, people with low vision can struggle with even the simplest of daily tasks: opening the post, reading the paper, even recognising friends and family on the street. Said to occur in all people whose sight problems cannot be corrected with prescription glasses or contact lenses, low vision is most common in older people, and caused by conditions such as age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and retina problems caused by diabetes. However, it's also seen in younger people who have a congenital or hereditary disorder of the eye, or who have suffered an eye injury affecting their sight. For both groups, low vision can cause real damage to their independence, confidence and privacy.

Following a diagnosis of low vision, in hospitals around the UK, an eye clinic liaison officer will be able to recommend a wide range of help and rehabilitation support, including signposting to other services, using technology, and support with the administration.

According to Louise Gow, the specialist lead for eye health at Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), technology has made life a whole lot easier and better for people with low vision. "Accessing technology can be daunting to some people, but once they get to grips with it, they do find it easy to use, and it can make a big difference," she says.

Among the technologies to emerge for people with low vision are intuitive wearable devices that use artificial intelligence. One example is the OrCam MyEye device, which uses a tiny camera with a speaker fitted to one arm of a normal pair of glasses to instantly tell the user what the camera can see.

Suitable for people with a wide range of sight loss, including those who can see (but with difficulty) and those who are fully blind, OrCam MyEye enables people to read printed and digital material in real time. It can also be programmed to recognise familiar products as well as people's faces, reducing embarrassment or risk of offence in social situations.

Michael Crossland, specialist optometrist at Moorfields Eye Hospital, describes the OrCam MyEye device as "a very exciting development in low vision rehabilitation". He says: "It is great to have a product which enables text-to-speech reading in a real world environment." OrCam International Director, Leon Paull adds: "Worldwide, thousands of people use this breakthrough technology on a daily basis and as a result are achieving a much higher level of independence." ■



Read more on
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Children's eye health

Whether your child wears glasses or not, it's important to take them for regular eye tests as problems can develop at any age. Here are some of parents' most common eyesight questions answered:

How can I tell if my child has vision problems?

Children rarely complain about their vision, because they don't know how well they should be able to see. However, there are signs you can look out for that may indicate a problem. These include sitting too close to the TV, rubbing their eyes a lot, holding objects very close to the face, blinking a lot or one eye turning either in or out.

How often should my child have an eye test?

After your child's first eye examination, it is important to continue with regular checks. Your child should have a check-up at least every two years as problems can occur at any age and, even if there are no obvious symptoms, there could be an underlying eye condition.

What if my child can't read yet?

Using techniques suitable to your child's stage of development, opticians can use shapes, picture books and other materials to help children indicate what they can see and how clearly.

As children grow so rapidly, how can I be sure the glasses will fit well?

Research undertaken with help from the Association of British Dispensing Opticians helped us identify a lack of small frames that fit children really well. Our team of scientists has introduced a number of changes in design and sizing to ensure the best anatomical fit for young faces. Ensuring the right fit is essential – the lenses should be positioned correctly in front of the eyes and the glasses need to be comfortable, remain stable and not inhibit or damage developing features.

The teenage years

Many children will start needing prescription eyewear in their teens, because this is a prime time for the development of near-sightedness, or myopia. It's important to encourage teenagers to get into the habit of having regular eye examinations, even if they don't think there's anything wrong with their vision. Uncorrected vision problems can affect all aspects of their lives: their studies at school or university, their job, their ability to play sport and even their social life. And, if they need help with their vision, there are all sorts of solutions – from regular glasses to prescription sunglasses, contact lenses and even prescription goggles for playing sports.

Software for schools

Specsavers has partnered with Thomson Screening to develop new vision screening software for schools (more on page 25) SchoolScreener EZ®. The easy-to-use kit can detect signs of vision problems and advise whether a full eye examination is needed. Schools can register to receive their free kit at screeningforschools.com

When should my child have their first eye test?

Children should have regular eye examinations from the age of three. A child's eyes won't be fully developed until they are eight years old. During this developmental period, opticians may be able to correct some eye conditions – as long as they are detected early enough. Conditions such as amblyopia (lazy eye) and strabismus (crossed eye) often go undetected, possibly leading to lifelong problems. In serious cases, this can result in partial, irreversible sight loss. However, when detected early, many problems can be easily corrected. ■



Read more on healthawareness.co.uk

Stopping glaucoma before it starts

By Ailsa Colquhoun

Glaucoma can take away up to 40 per cent of your sight before you even notice it's gone, and regular eye checks are the only way to stop the condition in its tracks.

"Glaucoma is an extremely common condition as it is the second largest cause of blindness in the UK. Unfortunately, glaucoma silently robs people of their vision, as it does not always present with symptoms in the initial stages," says George McNamara, Interim Director of Research, Policy and Innovation for Fight for Sight. Glaucoma is known as the 'silent thief of sight' for a good reason. For some people with the condition by the time they realise there is even a problem with their eyes, they have already lost up to 40 per cent of their sight. "The brain is very clever and when there is a problem with vision, it fills in the missing parts," explains Karen Osborn, CEO of the International Glaucoma Association (IGA). "It isn't until there is significant sight loss that a person thinks to visit an optometrist who can help detect what is happening."

Along with other charities such as the eye research charity Fight for Sight, the IGA is particularly keen to see men understand the importance of regular eye checks for glaucoma: men are 16 per cent more likely than women to have already suffered advanced vision loss because of the condition by the time glaucoma is diagnosed.

This is probably due to men not seeking medical treatment as readily as women and waiting until symptoms are apparent – by which time eye sight can be lost for good. Mrs Osborn says: "If glaucoma is detected early, it can be managed and the remaining useful sight can usually be maintained throughout life."



Karen Osborn

CEO, International Glaucoma Association (IGA)



George McNamara

Interim Director of Research, Policy and Innovation for Fight for Sight

Causes of glaucoma

Glaucoma is usually caused by a blockage in the part of the eye that allows optical fluid to drain. This can lead to a build-up of fluid and pressure in the eye, which can damage the optic nerve.

It's often unclear exactly what causes glaucoma, although factors such as age, ethnicity (particularly African, Caribbean or Asian) and family history are involved. Mr McNamara says: "It's extremely important for families to discuss their health history, as this will encourage current and future generations to be more vigilant to changes in regards to their eyes." Neither is it clear whether people can do anything to prevent glaucoma, but having regular eye tests – at least every two years – will help ensure the condition is picked up as early as possible. The tests for glaucoma are painless, and include a visual check of the inside of the eye, a sight check and a fluid pressure test. For many patients the eye test will also be free. People should also not be put off by the thought that a diagnosis of glaucoma will cost them their driving licence. Karen says: "Although you do have to inform DVLA if you have glaucoma in both eyes, the

vast majority of people with the condition do not then lose their licences."

Research funded by Fight for Sight is helping to develop smartphone-based mobile screening technology that should make glaucoma testing quicker, easier and more convenient, particularly for hard-to-reach groups such as care home residents. According to Mr McNamara, these are the very people who can be most at risk.

Currently, treatment for glaucoma is usually lifelong, involving daily eye-drops, and mastering good technique can be tricky (see box). Happily, more convenient treatments such as implants are already in development. In the meantime, people with glaucoma can readily access healthcare professionals such as the high street pharmacist, who can offer specialist help and advice on glaucoma care. Mrs Osborn says: "Medical professionals have become much more patient-focused and will spend the time with patients to get the treatment right. There's been a real sea-change in the way the condition is managed and this can only benefit patients." ■

Mastering the use of glaucoma eye drops

1. **Wash and dry your hands**
2. **Find a comfortable position** (sitting on a chair, standing in front of a mirror, laying on bed)
3. **Shake drop bottle** gently
4. **Lean back**, pull down lower lid
5. **Administer one drop**, close your eye and put your finger over the inner corner of your eye for up to two minutes
6. **Repeat with other eye**, if necessary
7. **If you have to administer** more than one type of eye drop, wait five minutes between each
8. **Remove contact lenses** before administering drops, and wait 15 minutes before the lens goes back in
9. **Get into a routine.** If you use a drop more than once a day, make sure the times are evenly spaced, and use at the same time each day
10. **If you tend to forget**, try putting your drops in the fridge; a cold drop is easier to remember

**T
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Transforming eye health

INSPIRATION



PHOTO CREDIT: ALAN MURPHY

Living with glaucoma

Alan Murphy was 37 when a trip to the opticians detected he had the early stages of glaucoma; the second leading cause of visual impairment and a condition that affects the nerves in the eye that connect to the brain.

Paula Cunningham, optician and store director at Specsavers Connswater, in Belfast, said: 'It was eight years ago when Alan came to us for his regular contact lens appointment. As his two-yearly eye test was almost due, I carried out a full test and was concerned that his optic nerves did not look as healthy as I would have

expected. I subsequently referred him for further investigation and he was diagnosed as suffering from glaucoma.'

Thanks to the early diagnosis Alan can now manage his condition by using daily eye drops. The glaucoma has left him with some loss of his peripheral vision. Other than that, he can still see well enough to continue driving, working and playing football. This might not have been

the case if his glaucoma had not been picked at such an early stage.

Alan's case was unusual, as there was no family history of the condition and it is also rare to have it so young. He is now a true advocate of regular eye tests and good eye health, ever since early diagnosis saved his sight.

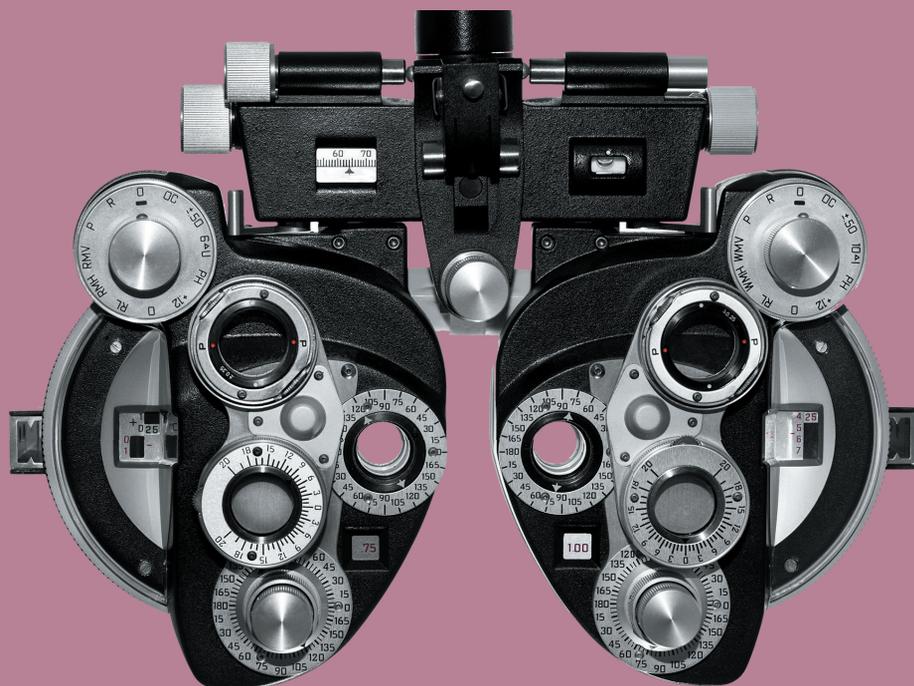
Alan said: 'I would strongly urge people to go for regular eye tests. I am grateful that Specsavers urged

me to have a full eye test as I had no idea that there was anything wrong with my eyes, other than needing my regular contact lens check up. I was shocked to learn that I had the early signs of glaucoma and how serious it could have become if left untreated.'

Paula, added: 'As is clear from Alan's case, early detection and treatment is essential. Glaucoma can only be detected through a full eye test. It develops gradually and the sufferer is

often unaware of any problem until it is quite severe. Any damage caused cannot be reversed therefore the key message for the public is to get their eyes tested at least every two years, especially as they get older.' ■

 Read more on healthawareness.co.uk



YOUR
MILLIONS OF US
FAILING TO HAVE

DON'T GET LEFT IN

What do your eyes say about your health?

A routine eye test does more than just assess your sight: a range of life-threatening illnesses can be detected by your optometrist well before you start to feel ill.

By Ailsa Colquhoun

What does an optometrist see when they switch on that light and look into your eyes? Specsavers' optometrist, Dr Nigel Best, has shared some optometry secrets on six potentially fatal diseases that an eye test can detect:

Diabetes: High blood-glucose levels can damage the blood vessels next to the retina. During the examination an optometrist can see any tiny leaks that result.

Hypertension:

Hypertension, or high blood pressure, is symptomless, but is a key risk factor for stroke, heart disease and vascular dementia. Optometrists look out for squiggly blood vessels in the retina and any bleeding behind the eye.

Raised cholesterol: High levels of cholesterol can visibly clog or

block the blood vessels in the eyes. A total blockage can also lead to visual blind spots.

Eye cancer: Cancerous growths inside the eye are very visible.

Brain tumour: A brain tumour can increase the pressure inside your brain, and in turn, can cause the optic disc to visibly swell. An optometrist can spot these signs often before other symptoms such as headaches or nausea begin.

Multiple sclerosis (MS): MS causes inflammation of the optic nerve, which creates a banana-shaped field defect called a scotoma near to the eye's retina.

Future possibilities

Although most people are familiar with the high street optometrist and optician service, optometrists also practice in hospitals and in GP surgeries. Increasingly, you might also see them pull up in a van to offer a mobile service – such as that



Dr Nigel Best

Clinical spokesperson,
Specsavers



Daniel Hardiman-McCartney

MCOptom Clinical Adviser, College
of Optometrists

provided by Specsavers Healthcall – in a community space, residential care home or even a private home. According to Specsavers' optometrist Dr Nigel Best, the past 25 years have seen an "enormous change in optometrist training, and an explosion in the optometrist's skill set".

Advances in technology have increased both the range of settings in which optometrists can practice, and the range of tests they can do. For example, there is a new test in

development for early Alzheimer's disease, which can manifest in the eye as a build-up of plaque, and there is a new mobile phone app, which can scan the white of your eye (the sclera) for the first signs of pancreatic cancer.

To identify and advise on such a wide range of conditions, optometrists have to undergo challenging training pre- and post-qualification and all have a degree. Some optometrists also gain specialist

qualifications in areas such as paediatric eye care (such as squints and lazy eyes in children), prescribing low vision aids and contact lens fitting. Many will also become accredited to support GPs and hospital consultants in managing more complex eye conditions. Since 2008, optometrists have also been able to prescribe certain medicines, such as antibiotic or antihistamine eye drops.

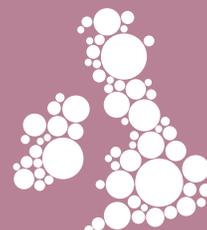
At registration, all optometrists are members of the College of Optometrists (CO) and will use the initials MCOptom or FCOptom after their name. They may also display a membership sign in their practices. College membership and any other specialist qualifications are listed against the optometrist's registration with the General Optical Council, whose register is open to the public to search, advises CO clinical advisor Daniel Hardiman-McCartney. ■

 Read more on healthawareness.co.uk

VISION MATTERS

WE ARE PUTTING OUR EYE HEALTH AT RISK BY
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**NATIONAL EYE
HEALTH WEEK**

MONDAY 18 – SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2017

YOUR VISION MATTERS

 EXPERT TIPS

Eight tips for eye health

- 1 **Get tested**
According to the State of the Nation's Eye health 2017: A Year in Review report, a quarter of us have not had an eye test within the last two years, as recommended. Eye tests are vital for detecting potential eye health issues and are free for many people on the NHS, including under-16s, over-60s, those on low incomes and people with a close family history of glaucoma.
- 2 **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.
- 3 **Quit smoking**
Smoking contributes to many eye health issues. Smokers are four times more likely to lose their sight than non-smokers. It also causes dry eye syndrome, uveitis and impair your colour vision.
- 4 **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.
- 5 **Wear sunglasses**
Cumulative UV exposure can increase your risk of developing cataracts and macular degeneration. Look out for the CE, UV 400 or British Standard marks – this ensures they provide a safe level of protection from the sun's damaging UVA and UVB rays.
- 6 **Exercise**
Taking regular exercise could reduce the risk of sight loss from narrowing or hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure and diabetes.
- 7 **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.
- 8 **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.

So, give your eyes regular and frequent breaks.



PHOTO: SPECSAVERS

Work, rest and play

Whatever you do, your eyes work hard. It's important to give them a rest from time to time to avoid eye strain

Eye strain usually occurs after periods of intense use of the eyes, such as computer work, driving, reading or using apps and games. Symptoms include sore, tired, burning or itchy eyes, headaches, difficulty focusing, watery eyes, dry eyes, blurred or double vision, and increased sensitivity to light.

Although no lasting damage is caused and symptoms will go away after resting the eyes, eye strain can be uncomfortable and frustrating.

It's important to make sure that you are not overworking your eyes. Here are some simple steps you can take in your everyday life to protect yourself from eye strain.

Driving

Long periods of driving are a common cause of eye strain, so it's important to take regular breaks, even if you don't feel tired. Eye strain can make it difficult to focus, or cause blurred or double vision, which is especially dangerous when you're on the road.

Certain eyewear is safer than others for driving. For example, polarising lenses reduce glare if you're driving in the sun, and lenses with an anti-reflective coating are better for night-time driving.

You should always wear your glasses or contact lenses when driving if you need them, and carry a spare pair of glasses or lenses with you, especially on long journeys or when driving abroad.

DONT FORGET: Car windscreens protect against UV but side and rear windows don't, so make sure you and your

"Tech neck can be eased by limiting the amount of time spent on mobile devices"

passengers wear sunglasses that protect against UV.

Mobile phones and tablets

Eye strain is often accompanied by neck and shoulder pain, or 'tech neck', which can be caused by holding your head in an uncomfortable position to look at your screen, keyboard or mobile device.

This has become an even bigger problem in recent years due to the increase in people using computer screens all day and mobile devices all evening.

Each time you crane your neck to look down at your smartphone or tablet, you add excess pressure to your spine, causing pain in the neck and shoulders, and also putting you at risk of causing permanent damage.

"Tech neck" can be eased by limiting the amount of time spent on mobile devices.

Occupational glasses can also help, which work in a similar way to varifocals but with viewing areas designed specifically for office work and mobile/tablet use. An up-close viewing area at the bottom of the lens allows you to move your eyes downwards to read, instead of bending your neck.

DONT FORGET: Repetitive neck strain puts you at risk of suffering permanent damage.

Computer use

Prolonged computer use is the most common cause of eye strain and can lead to headaches, sore or tired eyes. If you use a computer for work, it's important to take regular breaks from looking at your screen. Make sure that you have adequate lighting, and use an anti-glare screen to minimise reflections coming off your monitor and into your eyes. If you are a glasses wearer, you should also use lenses with an anti-reflective coating to reduce glare from your screen.

DONT FORGET: If you need glasses specifically for work, your employer should cover the cost. ■

The 20 20 20 rule

To avoid eye strain, it's important to take regular breaks from looking at your computer screen or mobile device. Follow the 20 20 20 rule: look away from your screen every 20 minutes and gaze at a distant object 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds.



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INSPIRATION

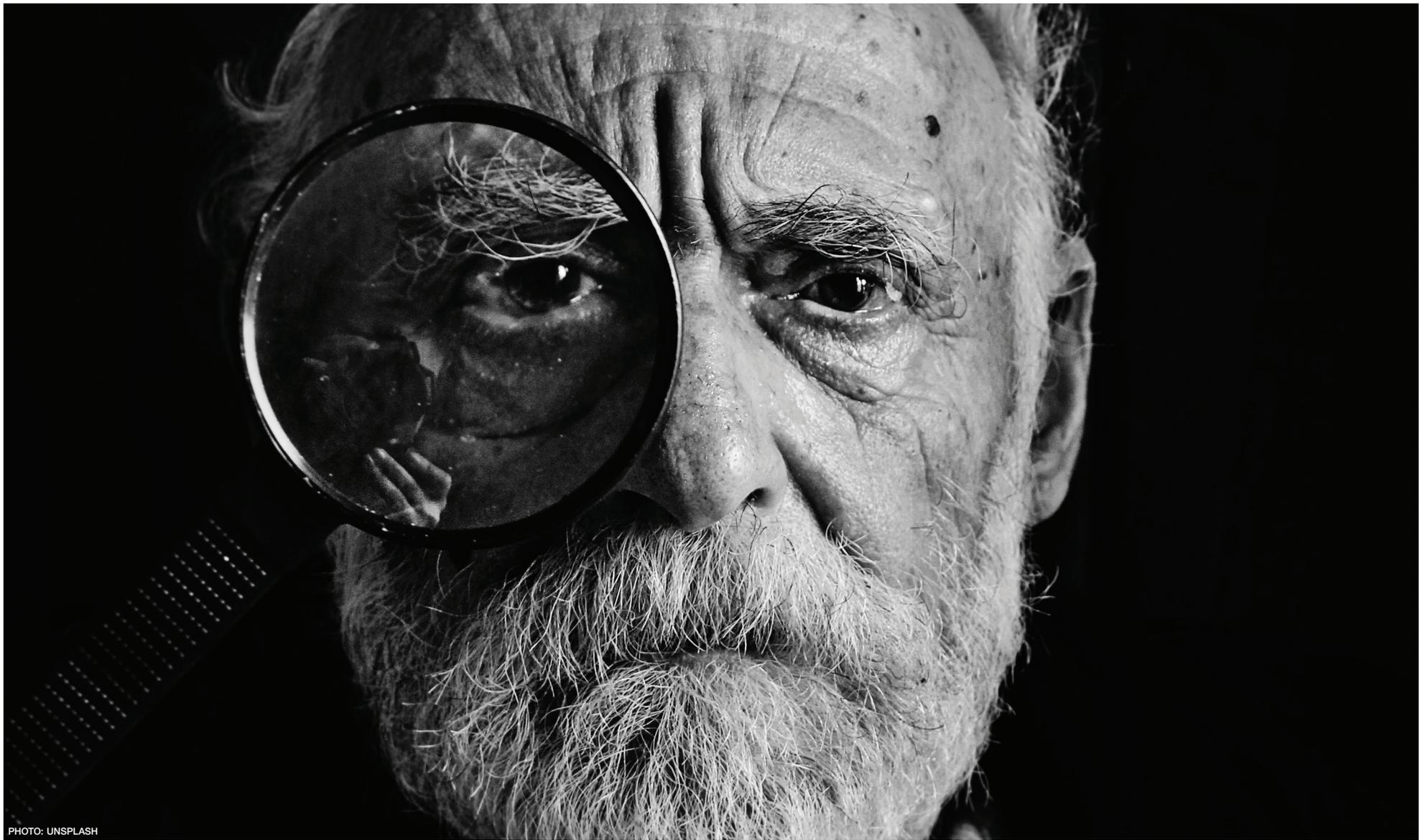


PHOTO: UNSPLASH

Great-grandfather urges housebound not to neglect eye health

Richard Wooding is calling for those who are unable to leave their homes to take advantage of domiciliary eye care after a home-visiting optician saved his vision and detected signs of a potentially life-threatening condition.

The retired carpenter, who was hospitalised for nearly two months after he suffered a stroke in 2016, complained of loss of vision in his left eye after he was discharged from hospital. Convinced something was wrong he decided to book a home appointment with Specsavers Healthcall. Following a thorough eye examination at his home, Richard's optometrist made an immediate hospital referral for further checks.

Within 24 hours and further tests at the hospital, Richard was diag-

nosed with having another stroke, which was the reason he was unable to see out of his left eye. A blood clot was removed allowing him to see again, saving his sight and sparing further damage to the rest of his body.

As an avid reader, Richard is delighted with how a simple at-home eye test has played a massive difference to his life. He says: 'I now realise regular eye tests are so important not only for detecting a change in vision, but also for any other underlying health conditions. I'd urge anyone who is unable to visit a Specsavers store unaccompanied, to get in

touch with the Specsavers Healthcall team.'

Dr Nigel Best, Specsavers clinical spokesperson says: 'Richard's case is just one example of the importance of regular eye tests for those unable to come to a store. From an all-round inclusive eyecare service, the Specsavers Healthcall service provides NHS funded eye examinations, dispensing of glasses and aftercare.'

Specsavers Healthcall is one of the UK's largest home-visiting opticians. It is continuing to improve the eyecare for thousands of housebound residents with its comprehensive service and quality products. ■

Eye care at home

If you're eligible for a free NHS eye test, you may also be entitled to a free home eye test, when an optometrist comes to visit you:

- **At home** – if you're unable to leave home unaccompanied
- **Within sheltered accommodation or a care home** – if you're a resident and unable to leave the accommodation unaccompanied



To find out more or book a home eye test call **0800 652 4948** or visit www.specsavers.co.uk/home-eye-tests

Free home eye tests



Now everyone can benefit from Specsavers' value and choice, even if they are unable to visit a high street optician unaccompanied. With Specsavers Healthcall, eligible customers can have a full eye test at home, in a care home or in sheltered accommodation with one of our home-visiting opticians. What's more, should they need glasses, they'll be able to choose from hundreds of styles and take advantage of the same offers that they'd find in store.

**To book a home visit, call 0800 198 1138
or search Specsavers home eye test**



INSPIRATION



COLUMN

Minor Eye Issues

Minor Eye Conditions Service (MECS) is suitable for patients with the following minor eye conditions:

R

Red eyes or sore eyelids

D I

Dry, gritty or uncomfortable eyes

Irritation and inflammation of the eye

S R

Significant recent sticky discharge from the eye or watery eyes

Recently occurring flashes and floaters

P I

Painful eye

In-growing eyelashes

F S

Foreign body in the eye

Sudden onset of blurred vision



PHOTO: SPECSAVERS

GP for the eyes

Did you know that many of us can now be treated for minor eye conditions without having to go to our GP? We explain how to access these services in your community and for what conditions.

There are times when we may experience a minor eye issue, and many people will head straight to their local A&E or GP surgery. But did you know that there is a new service being introduced across some areas, which means you may not need hospital treatment, and means that pressure is taken off our emergency services.

The Minor Eye Conditions Service (MECS) can be accessed in your local community and means that, for certain issues, you can see an optometrist, rather than going to A&E or your GP.

Peter Hampson, Clinical Director at the Association of Optometrists (AOP), explained the value of these extended optometry services.

“Optical practices contain highly qualified staff and are well-equipped to diagnose and advise on eye conditions. Not everyone will have heard of MECS, but it is a highly useful, NHS-funded service, available to all patients who are registered with a GP, in an MECS area,” he explained.

“The service means that an optometrist or contact lens optician, who



Dr Susan Blakeney

Clinical Adviser, College of Optometrists

is specifically accredited to provide MECS, can now see patients for non-sight related examinations like red eye or flashes and floaters. Previously, patients with these types of conditions would have been referred to hospital or charged privately. The service can be used for a range of recent onset eye conditions that are best suited to evaluation within an optical practice. You can refer yourself or attend at the suggestion of your GP.”

Seeking treatment

“Optical practices that offer MECS are based in your local community, making them easier to access, and they also have specialist eye equipment, which is not usually available in your GP surgery. Each practice has highly trained professionals who have

specialist knowledge and experience to help you manage your eye related problem,” Peter commented.

“Using MECS means that GPs can save appointments for those that they are best placed to help and it lets optical practices do what they do best. Thankfully, most eye conditions don’t require emergency treatment and when patients make use of MECS instead of their A&E department, they reduce pressure on hospitals as well.”

Dr Susan Blakeney, Clinical Adviser at the College of Optometrists added: “An optometrist will take a history and then examine your eye. If they are able to diagnose and treat your condition, they will do so. If they are not able to manage your condition, they will refer you elsewhere for treatment.”

It is important, however, to remember that there are certain conditions that aren’t suitable for MECS, which are generally the more serious eye conditions.

Dr Blakeney explained: “GPs are not well placed to deal with eye problems, as they do not have the equipment to examine the eye thoroughly. If you have a serious problem that could be sight threatening, and, if you have an eye casualty near you, it is best to go there. Otherwise, go to a normal accident and emergency department.” ■



Read more on healthawareness.co.uk

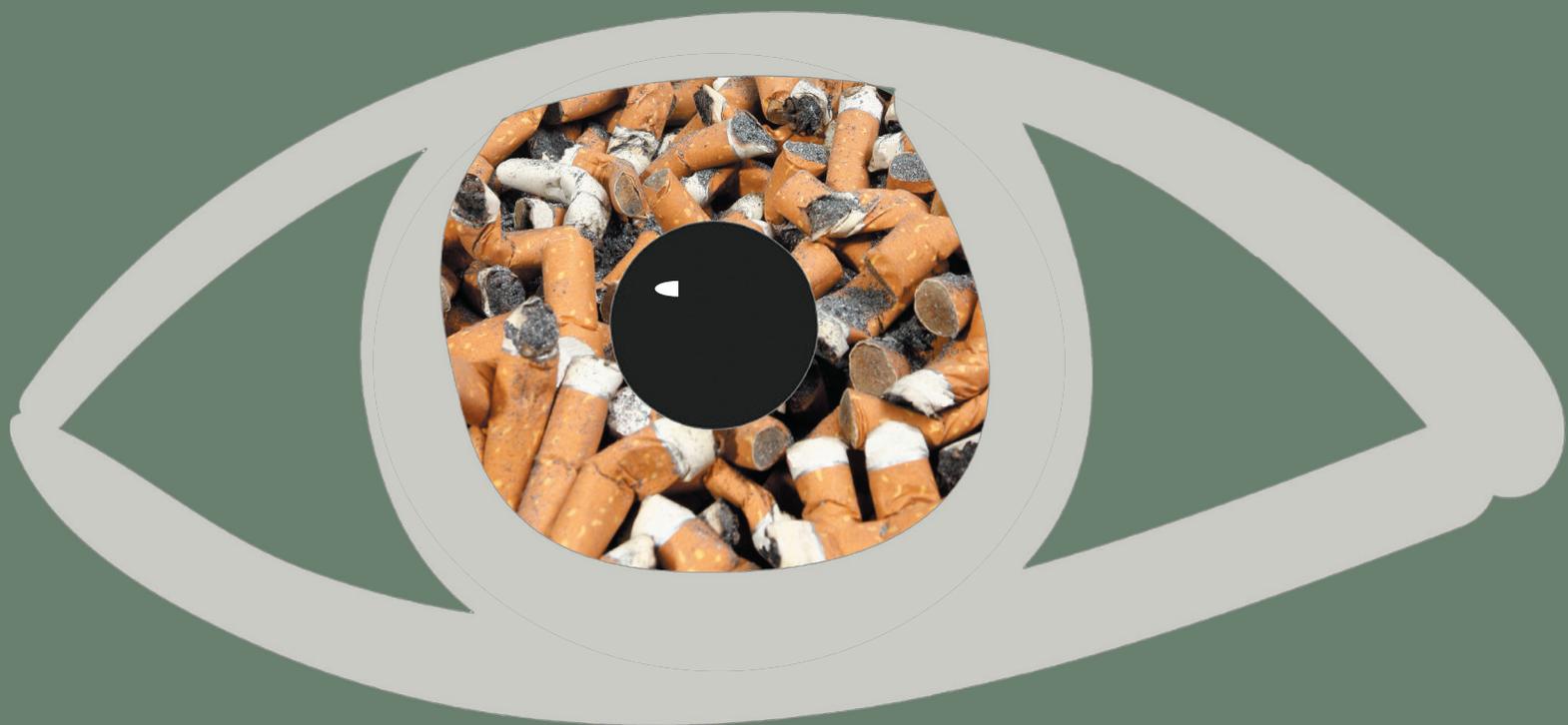


**NATIONAL EYE
HEALTH WEEK**

MONDAY 18 – SUNDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2017

YOUR VISION MATTERS

SMOKING CAUSES SIGHT LOSS



SMOKERS ARE UP TO FOUR TIMES
MORE LIKELY TO LOSE THEIR
SIGHT THAN NON-SMOKERS*

*Source: BMA Tobacco Resource Centre

INSPIRATION



PHOTO: SPECSAVERS

Perfect vision doesn't mean healthy eyes

It is easy to forget about your eye health when you have good vision because you may be unaware of the onset of disease before symptoms appear.

In fact, 50 per cent of sight loss could have been avoided with the right treatment at the right time, which is why it is important to visit your optometrist regularly for a comprehensive eye health check.

You may not be aware that there is so much more than an optometrist can learn from an eye examination than the prescription for your new glasses or contact lenses.

Optometrists, who are armed with the latest OCT technology, are able to look for the very earliest signs of disease – especially important if you have a family history of glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration or diabetes. And according to the experts, Heidelberg Engineering, by using high-tech scanning, OCT can help your optometrist to identify the earliest signs of retinal disease and glaucoma – perhaps long before you are aware of any symptoms, giving you a head-start on treating the condition for the most successful outcome. ■

Take time to test

Eye tests are crucial for all of us for many different reasons. Here, our experts explain why, and what to expect.

Did you know that three quarters of us admit to experiencing poor eye health, including blurred vision or sore, irritated eyes in the last 12 months, with one in five of us saying this restricts our daily lives and impacts on our ability for enjoyment of everyday activities?

Yet, despite this, nearly 154 million people fail to have their eyes checked once every two years, as recommended; this is a cause for concern.

David Cartwright, Chairman of the charity, Eye Health UK, commented: "Poor uptake of eye tests is probably the biggest risk of the nation's eye health. A routine eye test can do more than assess your sight. It could save your life. Warning signs for a range of life-threatening illnesses can be detected by your optometrist.

Eye tests explained

It's important to point out that an eye test assesses far more than your sight. Dr Ian Beasley, Optometrist and Head of Education at the Association of Optometrists (AOP), added: "Every eye test is tailor-made, depending on your needs. Everyone should have an eye test every two years, or more often if your optometrist recommends it. A regular eye test is important, not only because it offers a health check for your eyes, but as part of the examination your optometrist will do a number of checks including:

- Pick up signs of eye disease
- Check your sight and make it clearer or more comfortable to see



Ian Beasley

Head of Education, Association of Optometrists (AOP)

- Keep you informed about new products or services that can help you

Your optometrist will also check for signs of underlying general health issues that sometimes show in the eyes. This could mean that conditions such as diabetes, high cholesterol and high blood pressure are first identified during your eye test".

Certain people may require greater frequency of eye tests, for various reasons. Dr Beasley explained: "You might be at higher risk where you have a family history of an eye condition, from long and short sightedness, or a lazy eye, to something more serious, such as glaucoma. It might be necessary for you to have a more regular check-up, for example, as you get older, to monitor your vision; your optometrist will advise you.

What to expect

Eye tests are a routine, straightforward process, so, what can you expect? "At the start of the appointment, your optometrist will ask if you are visiting for a routine check-up or if you have come for a specific reason. You will

be asked what symptoms you have, if any, how long you have had them and whether any changes have happened suddenly or slowly over a period," explained Dr Susan Blakeney, Clinical Adviser at The College of Optometrists.

"You will also be asked about your general health, including any medication you're taking, whether you suffer from headaches, or have any close relatives with a history of eye problems. You will be asked about your previous glasses or contact lenses and they may also ask about the kind of work you do and whether you play sports or have any hobbies."

Remember to take your glasses or contact lenses with you if you already use them.

Dr Blakeney continued: "The optometrist will examine both the outside and inside of your eyes. Inside of your eyes will be examined using an ophthalmoscope, which is a special torch, or with a slit lamp and a handheld lens in front of your eye. The optometrist will determine whether you will need spectacles, and if so, what is the best prescription for you. This will involve you looking at letters on a chart and saying whether various lenses make it blurry."

"Your optometrist will also carry out tests on your eye muscles to check how your eyes are working together. Sometimes, it may be necessary to check your peripheral vision using a special instrument. This test for certain conditions of the eyes or visual parts of your brain. You may also need an eye pressure test, which is one of the procedures used to detect glaucoma." ■



Read more on healthawareness.co.uk



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WE'RE HELPING RNIB SO YOU NEVER NEED THEM

A regular eye test can keep your eyes healthy
and detect a range of health conditions.

At least 50% of sight loss is avoidable.
Book a discounted eye test at [specsavers.co.uk](https://www.specsavers.co.uk)



Transforming eye health



IMPORTANT INFORMATION INSIDE

By looking into your eyes, our opticians can keep your eyes healthy and detect a range of health conditions.

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Transforming eye health