

DANIEL HARDIMAN-MCCARTNEY

Top 5 ways in which your optometrist can help you.

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A simple way of treating glaucoma.

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Staring at a screen can reduce your blink rate by as much as 60%.

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Vision and Eye Health

HEALTHAWARENESS.CO.UK



Souleyman Bah is a 20-year-old Para Athlete for Great Britain, running in the T13 100m. He has represented his country at the junior Paralympics and won a gold medal in 2015. Now, he has set his sights on the Tokyo 2020 games. And the age of six, he was diagnosed with retinis pigmentosa (RP).



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Be clear about the importance of good eye care

Two thirds of us (67%) worry about our long-term eyesight.¹ It's right that we should be concerned, according to new research by Optrex.

Research shows one in three people aged 60+ who miss out on regular eye examinations say the quality of their vision makes them feel depressed and vulnerable,² while other consequences of low vision in our advancing years include loss of independence and increased risk of falls.³

David Cartwright, optometrist and chairman of Eye Health UK – the charity responsible for National Eye Health Week (23 – 29 September) – explains why we should all be taking better care of our eye health.

While our visual acuity steadily declines and our risk of developing a sight-threatening eye condition increases as we age, there are some simple things we can do to prevent avoidable sight loss in the future.

Eye exams matter

Failing to have regular sight tests (once every two years, unless advised

otherwise by your optometrist), is probably the biggest threat to eye health. Almost 14 million Brits don't have regular tests⁵ despite them being essential health checks.

Not only can an eye exam 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, high blood pressure and early signs of heart disease.

Eye exams take around 30 minutes and are usually free

An eye exam should be as much a part of your healthcare regime as having a dental check-up.

Routine sight tests take around 30 minutes and for millions of us they're absolutely free – paid for either by the NHS or your employer.

Many local optical practices also now offer NHS appointments for conditions like conjunctivitis or dry eye.

“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.”

Lifestyle counts towards optimal eye health

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 are also vital for good eye health.

Go outdoors to reduce your chances of short-sightedness

Evidence is also emerging to say that spending more than two hours

a day outdoors can reduce the risk of myopia (short-sightedness), even if there is a family history of the condition.

It's sometimes thought that if you are short-sighted you just need to get some glasses and you've solved the problem. However, myopia can be a risk factor for other eye conditions later in life and so it needs to be treated seriously.

Modern lives take their toll on our eyes

Busy lives mean not all of us get the essential nutrients our eyes need from eating a healthy balanced diet so, for some, supplements may be beneficial.

Intensive screen use is also causing more of us to experience Digital Eye Strain (sore, tired, itchy eyes; headache; temporary blurred vision, dry eyes and pain in the neck and shoulders).⁸

WRITTEN BY:
DAVID CARTWRIGHT
Optometrist and Chairman,
Eye Health UK



The Big Blink

That's why we're joining forces with Vision Express to launch the Big Blink during National Eye Health Week to encourage everyone to follow the 20-20-20 rule – look up from your screen every 20 minutes and focus on something 20 feet away for 20 seconds – when using digital devices. ■

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk

1: Optrex eye health survey of 2,000 UK Adults conducted by One Poll between 13 – 16 August 2019 2: Sight After Sixty report, EHUK 3: Visual impairment increases the risk of suffering a fall by 2.5 times [Rubenstein and Josephson 2002] 4: Generation Eye Report, EHUK 5: Atomik research 6: bmjophth.bmj.com/content/3/1/e000146



The importance of children's eye health and the impact of lifestyle



WRITTEN BY:
MEENA RALHAN

Optom and Optical Compliance Office

Q&A with Meena Ralhan on the importance of regular eye testing, screen time and nutrition for maintaining good eye health.

What are the signs that a child may need a sight test? Does this vary for different age groups?

All children are entitled to a free eye test on the NHS. Parents who have shortsightedness, any squint or lazy eye history in the family should have their children tested early on, i.e. before five years old.

Opticians have special methods to test children, even if they can't read letters, and can detect any lazy eyes or squints. Noticing one eye turning in could be a sign and children sitting too close to the TV can indicate shortsightedness. Children rubbing their eyes a lot or scrunching up their faces, squinting, to see far could also indicate shortsightedness, so it's very important to go to the opticians for the early checks.

A pair of glasses for a short time can help fix the issue while the child's visual system is still developing, and they then may not need glasses later in life. Children under two years of age with a squint tend to knock or bump into things – or even fall over – and an optician can detect any issues with their vision early on.

Can too much screen time affect children's eyes and vision?

With modern technology at its peak, children are increasingly spending a proportion of their day using screens. Their daily screen time has increased compared to 10 years ago, whether that be in school or home. Mobile phones, handheld devices and TV screens all add to daily screen time.

Children using handheld devices,

such as tablets and mobile phones, should be limited to 20 minutes at a time with a five-minute break after 20 minutes - this is because screen use reduces the blink rate and can contribute to dry eyes and discomfort.

There can also be eyestrain as the focusing power of the eyes is being exerted too much for too long if breaks are not taken. The far muscles can also weaken, which increases the risk of shortsightedness.

If the near muscles are constantly engaged on near devices, the 20-20-20 rule must apply to give the muscles a rest - after 20 minutes, take a 20 second break by looking 20 feet away.

How important is nutrition and diet for eye health?

A varied and healthy balanced diet is key to the wellbeing, healthy growth and development of children. The eyes are no different and need a variety of nutrients to help maintain good eye health.

For eye diseases such as age-related macular degeneration (ARMD), dark, leafy green vegetables are known to help prevent it.

Nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, zinc, lutein, vitamins C and E may help slow down ARMD or cataracts. Foods like salmon or oily fish, nuts and beans and citrus fruits contain the above nutrients.

Sugary, starchy and processed foods can all lead to diabetes, which does affect the eyes and can lead to sight loss.

Vision can be preserved in everyone, regardless of age, by:

- Having regular eye tests – recommended every two years and

every year for certain conditions. The optometrist can detect health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure and, on rare occasions, even brain tumours

- Stopping smoking is very important as smoking has been linked to cataracts and ARMD
- Eating a diet rich in fruit and vegetables and maintaining a healthy weight
- Being aware of your vision in each eye separately - sometimes conditions occur in one eye first. See your opticians straight away if you notice a decrease in one eye

- Wearing sunglasses to help prevent against cataracts and ARMD. UV light is damaging to the eyes. Look out for glasses carrying the "CE" Mark and British Standard BS EN ISO 12312-1:2013, which ensures that the sunglasses offer a safe level of UV protection.

Vision express are offering free eye tests when booked online at visionexpress.com ■

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Read more at visionexpress.com

How to safeguard your sight



WRITTEN BY:
DAN MCGHEE

Director,
Professional Services and MCOptom

Eat right for good sight

Eye-friendly nutrients found in many fruit and vegetables and fatty acids derived from fish, nuts and oils can all help protect your sight. Vitamins B and E can help protect against cataracts, while omega-3 fish oils help maintain healthy blood vessels inside the eye – research has shown that eating just one portion of fish a week can reduce your risk of developing age-related macular degeneration (AMD) by up to 40%.¹

Quit smoking

Smokers have a significantly greater risk of sight loss than non-smokers. Toxic chemicals in tobacco smoke can damage the delicate surface and the internal structure of the eye. This can lead to an increased risk of many eye conditions including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), nuclear cataracts; thyroid eye disease; dry eye and poor colour vision.

Watch your weight

A body mass index (BMI) of 30+ doubles your risk of suffering age-related macular degeneration² and significantly increases your chances of developing cataracts.

Get fit

Aerobic exercise can help increase oxygen supplies to the optic nerve and lower any pressure that builds up in the eye. Reducing intraocular 'eye' pressure can help control conditions such as glaucoma and ocular hypertension.

Dietary supplements

There are lots of dietary supplements on the market that claim to be beneficial for eye health. There is no good evidence that the general population should be taking these supplements, but they may be helpful for some people who have existing AMD.

Myth:

"You are what you eat doesn't apply to your eyes."

Fact:

Everyone knows that a healthy, balanced diet is good for your body, but it can also be good for your eyes. Enjoy a diet rich in spinach, kale, tuna and eggs to boost eye health.

¹: Chua, B., et al., Dietary fatty acids and the 5-year incidence of age-related maculopathy. Archives of Ophthalmology, 2006. 124(7): p. 981-986. ²: RNIB



The UK needs more optometrists

WRITTEN BY:
SARAH JOYCE
Superintendent Optometrist,
ASDA Opticians



The UK's ageing population and the increase of conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, are putting strain on ophthalmology centres, which are severely understaffed.

Our ageing population and the increase in conditions such as diabetes and hypertension, the demand on ophthalmology in hospitals is becoming unmanageable. This is worse in certain areas where, due to certain demographic profiles, these conditions are even more prevalent, putting a strain on the local healthcare system and vision charities.

Optometrists are well placed to support the NHS
We are constantly hearing that there are not enough GPs and doctors to support the population's need and, due to a lack of awareness, people will still often go to their GP or A&E for eye problems.

Local optometrists can manage many minor eye conditions and will be able to appropriately diagnose and manage more serious conditions, thus freeing up overstretched GPs and hospitals. Community services (in some parts of England), supplementary examination in Scotland and WECs in Wales recognise this, utilising optometrists' skills to support the NHS, and saving vital NHS funds.

Opticians have access to patients who are coming for their eye tests who may not be visiting another health professional, so we are also ideally positioned to support the NHS Healthy Living initiatives like smoking advice/cessation, weight management etc. Supermarkets with both pharmacy and optical departments can work together to ensure patients are getting the care from the right professional referring between the two departments. But, in order to achieve this, we must recruit

more eye care professionals.

In certain areas, there is a shortage of optometrists available, but the introduction of new university departments in these areas can support this workforce shortage. However, we need to also be encouraging students to consider entering into the profession to be able to support with this increase in demand.

Supporting and incentivising eye healthcare professionals

It is imperative that optometrists are continually learning and developing their skills throughout their careers, and therefore it is so important they have access to excellent continuing education & training.

At ASDA Opticians, our optometrists have annual CET events where they can gain important interactive education and peer review/discussion. They also have access to a CET app which has over 60 different courses available at any one time, so they can tailor their training to where they want to learn more or refresh their knowledge as well as access to optical journals with further CET materials.

ASDA opticians offer more accessible working hours, being open seven days a week, with extended hours. This allows our professionals to work more flexible hours to fit around their lives. ■

Read more at asda.com/opticians



Check your eyes during your weekly shop

WRITTEN BY:
SARAH JOYCE
Superintendent Optometrist,
ASDA Opticians



We need to increase awareness about the importance of regular eye examinations and how to access these services.

An eye examination is not just about whether you need glasses or not, it is an important health check not only for eye conditions such as glaucoma, cataracts or macular degeneration but also for general health conditions, such as diabetes, hypertension and even brain tumours, can be detected through an eye examination.

(diagnosed or undiagnosed); that equates to 6% of the UK population. Diagnosis more than doubled in the last 20 years. 1,700 people have their sight seriously affected by diabetes every year in the UK. By 2025, there will be more than five million estimated people with diabetes.

Glaucoma is one of the world's leading causes of blindness. Two per cent of the population over 40 have the condition. Often, there are no warning signs and a regular eye tests are important to detect early signs. Any vision loss is irreversible

Glaucoma and sight loss due to diabetes are on the rise
One in 16 people have diabetes

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Manufacturing glasses is a wasteful process; we must work to be more sustainable

WRITTEN BY:
TOM AYLETT

Category Planner,
Healthcare - Optical & Pharmacy Services
ASDA Opticians



but early detection, careful monitoring and regular use of treatment can avoid further sight loss.

Your local optometrist is ideally placed and has the skills to monitor and manage these conditions and this is why it is so important that people are having their eyes tested regularly.

It's often easier – and cheaper – to access a supermarket optician than your GP

We need to increase awareness among our communities about the importance of regular eye examinations and how to access these services. Just as we do now with pharmacists, we should be directing any eye-related concerns to our opticians, not GP surgeries or hospital eye clinics as a first port of call.

There has been much research to show the main reason patients don't get their eyes examined regularly is due to cost. At ASDA, we want to ensure that this is not the factor that stops our communities being able to have their eyes examined regularly. We do this by ensuring that our optical departments are affordable and we don't penalise patients for having bad eyes by

charging them more for things they need like thinner lenses or coatings on the spectacle lenses.

I think that opticians in supermarkets – where there is free parking, longer opening hours and local bus services – mean your eye health can be fitted around the other things on your to do list, making eye care even more accessible to all.

How often should I get my eyes tested?

Most children will need annual check-ups and most adults should have their eyes checked at least every two years. During your test, your optometrist will advise you whether you should be seen more frequently.

Raising the awareness of eye health and the need for our communities to have access to affordable eye care is about everyone in the optical industry pulling together, utilising skill sets of the professionals we have to ensure that we have an efficient eyecare system to avoid unnecessary sight loss. ■

Read more at asda.com/opticians

Sustainability is a topic that has gained a lot of interest over the past few years, and has started conversations in many industries, one of which is fashion.

Supermarkets across the country are becoming more environmentally conscious; reducing packaging and banning single-use carrier bags. Optical departments within supermarkets – not to be left behind – are quickly following this positive trend.

With sustainability projects like this happening and customers – rightly – starting to raise concerns about product sourcing and its effect on the environment, supermarket opticians need to work towards more sustainable spectacle ranges.

It is important to work closely with suppliers to realise the overall vision of designing styles that are viable using their current manufacturing processes, while also remaining fashionable and delivering great quality for customers.

Traditional glasses manufacturing can be very wasteful

Frame manufacturing is currently a relatively wasteful industry, as most off-cuts and imperfect frames cannot

easily be re-worked back into the production stream and find their way into landfill sites across the globe.

Over the last 10 years, however, there has been a lot of time and resource focussed on finding techniques that enable this waste stream to be viable for production.

Reviewing the manufacturing process and incorporating a recycling process – whereby the broken frames and pieces of normally discarded material could be reused and forged into a new range of lightweight and stylish frames – is the next step for a more sustainable production line.

Spectacles use a lot of protective packaging; we need to cut this down

Compared to grocery products, spectacle frames require a lot of transit packaging material that – currently – mostly ends up in landfill.

Working to minimising these materials as well as moving to materials that can be recycled

via standard recycling centres is important.

An example of reducing plastic is to have a temple protecting sleeve on just one arm of the frames instead of both, as this will still prevent them from rubbing in transit and damaging the frames, but halve the plastic being used for that purpose.

An example of moving to recyclable plastic is for the dummy lenses, that are only required in transit so that frames keep their shape for when the prescription lenses are added.

With the growing concern about the impact we are having on the environment, sustainability will ultimately become the new normal, and, as such, we're passionate about working with an innovative supplier who is kick-starting this movement within the optical industry, and hopefully further empowering our customers to drive this change through their purchase choices. ■

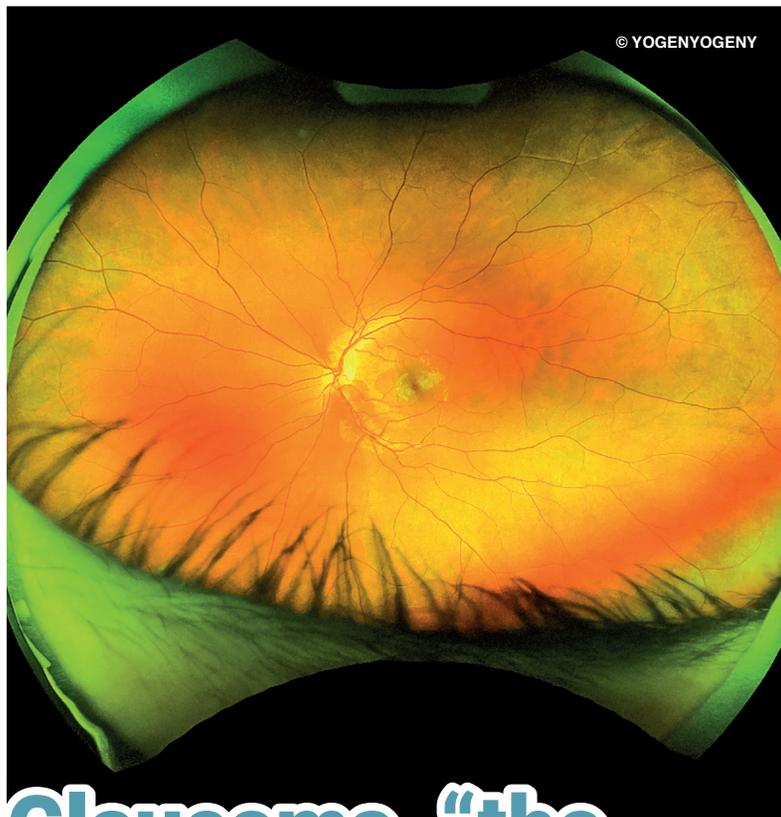
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Glaucoma, “the silent thief of sight”

It can develop imperceptibly over the course of years, even leading to blindness if undetected. We look at the value of regular eye checks and who should be particularly aware.

What should we look out for and who is most at risk?

“Everyone over 40 should have an eye check at least every two years,” stresses Vernon. “Glaucoma’s called the silent thief of sight because it has no symptoms until it’s very severe. Those who have a sibling with diagnosed glaucoma, and those of Afro-Caribbean extraction should be particularly careful because they are more prone.” And he’d add a surprise third group – drivers.

“I’ve had a number of patients, typically males who’ve always bought reading glasses off the shelf and turn up for their first eye check at 65 or 70 with visual symptoms; they can read the eye-test board perfectly well but they’ve actually lost a lot of side vision and have advanced glaucoma. At their first consultation I have to advise them that they have to stop driving immediately and inform the DVLA.”

Current and future treatments

Most cases of chronic glaucoma can be treated with eye drops, which usually cause no, or very minor, side effects but have to be used for life. Next lines of treatment are laser treatment and surgery, which are both increasingly successful and safe. Vernon says procedures called MIGS – minimally invasive glaucoma surgery – are also becoming more popular for early-stage glaucoma.

In the coming decades, he sees exciting developments in gene therapy: “Glaucoma is related to many genes; it would be a lot easier to identify and treat if it were a

INTERVIEW WITH:



PROFESSOR STEPHEN VERNON
Consultant Ophthalmologist

one-gene disease. If we can find out which affected gene a patient has and replace local cells to keep the eye pressure down, that could solve the problem.”

One of the main issues with glaucoma is detection and monitoring. “The number of patients will increase by 44% over the next 20 years in our ageing population – a huge increase that will be quite a drain on the health services,” explains Vernon. “You can’t just diagnose, give out some eye drops and forget about it: treatment needs to be monitored and adjusted as necessary.”

“It can be very hard to prevent loss of sight when a patient has been detected late. It’s better to have glaucoma diagnosed than not. Everyone, get regular checks.”

WRITTEN BY:
TREE ELVEN

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk



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Glaucoma: How does it occur and evolve?

Glaucoma is the leading cause of irreversible blindness globally. Visual loss from glaucoma can be prevented with an early diagnosis and treatment.

The eye contains a fluid known as aqueous humour that provides nourishment to its internal structures.

This fluid is produced behind the iris (coloured portion of the eye) and then is drained out through a sieve-like structure called the trabecular meshwork at the front part of the eye.

In some eyes, abnormalities in the drainage system lead to impairment of the normal aqueous humour outflow, and intraocular pressure (IOP) increases.

This high IOP may damage the optic nerve head in the back part of the eye and impair the communication between the eye and the part of the brain responsible for the vision.

In other cases, IOP may be relatively normal, but glaucoma occurs anyway because of the inability of the eye to handle mechanical stress where the nerve fibres leave the eye, or because of poor blood supply to these same nerve fibres.

Glaucomatous optic disc

In glaucoma, the optic nerve gets damaged. A portion of the optic nerve may be assessed during an eye exam, where it can be seen as a round structure (optic disc), with the pink or reddish section representing the neural tissue, which takes the visual information to the brain.

The whitish central part represents absence of neural tissue, and it is called the ‘cup’. Some amount of cupping is normal, but excessive cupping, or an increase in the amount of cupping over time, suggests glaucoma. There are many blood vessels that emerge from the

optic disc to the retina. Glaucoma causes loss of the neural reddish tissue and there is progressive cupping of the optic disc – enlargement of the whitish central part.

How does glaucoma evolve?

The great majority of glaucoma cases evolve silently, as patients may not notice vision loss until it is significant and present in both eyes, or may assume that vision loss is correctable, as it is for other conditions such as cataract.

When the disease is at advanced stages, most patients will then perceive visual abnormalities. Glaucomatous damage to the optic nerve is irreversible, so what is lost cannot be recovered.

The asymptomatic early stages of disease and irreversible nature of the glaucoma makes it one of the main causes of blindness worldwide.

Glaucoma does not have a cure, however, this disease can be treated and the worsening of glaucomatous damage can be limited or even stopped. Thus, an early detection associated to an appropriate treatment and follow-up can preserve your vision throughout your lifetime.

If one has glaucoma, what are the important things that can be done by the patient and his/her family members?

- Glaucoma patients must take eye drops on a daily basis and follow up lifelong with an ophthalmologist at least once/twice a year to evaluate for any worsening of disease;



- Family members – and especially siblings of glaucoma patients – must be screened annually for glaucoma;
- Any form of steroid therapy (oral, inhalational, injectable etc) can elevate IOP in glaucoma patients and should be avoided or given under strict vigilance;
- All systemic diseases like diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease should be well controlled in consultation with a qualified physician and drug interactions with glaucoma medications should be checked;
- Patients who are on anti-hypertensive medicines should avoid having a very low blood pressure, as low blood pressure may be harmful for glaucoma;
- Glaucoma patients can do all physical exercise (particularly aerobic exercise), which may protect against glaucoma. Yoga is acceptable but one should avoid exercises with head down postures like shirshasana/sarvangasana (yoga positions) as these can cause an increase in Intraocular pressure;
- Meditation and relaxation exercises can help reduce IOP and also decrease the stress and anxiety in glaucoma patients. ■

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk

The microscopic implant for glaucoma

Once, treatment options for glaucoma patients were limited. Now, however, a range of treatments are available, including stents which are implanted into the eye to act as drainage devices.

There's a good reason why glaucoma — a serious and progressive eye disease which causes permanent damage to the optic nerve — is known as 'the silent thief of sight'. It doesn't usually affect a person's central vision until its advanced stages, so can remain unnoticed and undiagnosed for years. By then, however, any damage may be irreversible. It can even lead to blindness.

Professor Philip Bloom is Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon at the Western Eye Hospital, London and Hillingdon Hospital, and Chairman of the International Glaucoma Association, a charity which supports patients with the condition. His message is: make sure you visit your optometrist for regular

eye checks. "Generally, sight lost to glaucoma can't be regained," he says. "So, prompt treatment is important, because there's no doubt that it can delay or prevent loss of vision."

The risk of glaucoma increases with age and ethnicity (people of Afro-Caribbean origin are at increased risk of certain forms of the disease); but, as a rule, the over 60s should have regular eye tests, as should anyone over 40 who has a close relative with the condition. What optometrists will be looking for is damage to the optic nerve, which is most commonly caused by raised pressure of fluid in the eye that hasn't been able to drain away properly. If they have any concern, patients will be referred to the eye department of their local hospital for further tests.

“ Generally, sight lost to glaucoma can't be regained. So, prompt treatment is important, because there's no doubt that it can delay or prevent loss of vision.”

INTERVIEW WITH:



PROFESSOR PHILIP BLOOM
Consultant Ophthalmic Surgeon, the Western Eye Hospital and Hillingdon Hospital and Chairman, the International Glaucoma Association

pressure by opening drainage tubes in the eye or decreasing the amount of fluid that forms there.

Normally, the most effective form of treatment for advanced glaucoma is an invasive surgical operation called a trabeculectomy, where a drainage hole is made into the eye wall which is then covered up by a flap of tissue.

Like all operations, however, it carries a risk of complications and often requires multiple follow up appointments with an ophthalmologist. "In some cases, it can lead to infection, and it also produces a little blister of fluid under the eyelid which may feel uncomfortable," says Professor Bloom.

So, in the last five to ten years, there has been a drive to discover an easier way of treating glaucoma, resulting in a plethora of new implant devices designed to treat early glaucoma through to glaucoma in the advanced stages.

The benefits of stent implants

One such device is a stent, which is put into the eye to act as a drainage device. "The newer stents are effective in early-to-moderate glaucoma because they are tiny, work long-term and have a safety profile similar to cataract surgery alone," says Professor Bloom. "We usually implant more than one stent at a time because it enhances the result for the patient."

Up to one in five cataract patients may also have early-moderate glaucoma. For some forms of glaucoma, cataract surgery — or lens replacement surgery — is an effective way of helping reduce intra-ocular pressure and can be carried out at the same time as a stent implant procedure. The procedure is painless and, afterwards, the patient won't know the stents are in place.

The future of glaucoma treatment

"Because these implants have an excellent safety profile, there is reduced need for follow-up appointments, which is not only beneficial for the patient, but also the NHS.

I think in future we'll be relying less on eye drops and more on laser surgery and trabecular micro-bypass devices, such as the stent, especially if their implantation is combined with cataract surgery." ■

WRITTEN BY:
TONY GREENWAY

Read more at
glaukos.com/en-uk

A simpler way of treating glaucoma

If you're diagnosed with glaucoma, several treatment options are available to reduce intraocular pressure from the build-up of fluid: eye drops, laser treatment, surgery or implants.

Some people tolerate drops well, while others can be non-compliant to their prescription, and these drops can cause ocular surface disease in some cases.

Laser treatments reduce



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GLAUKOS
Transforming Glaucoma Therapy

The role of your optometrist

WRITTEN BY:
DANIEL HARDIMAN-MCCARTNEY
Clinical Adviser,
the College of Optometrists



Optometrists are healthcare specialists who help people see clearly. They conduct sight tests and will recommend whether you need glasses or contact lenses.

You may have heard of the term, 'optician', which is the umbrella term for both dispensing opticians who measure, fit and dispense your glasses, and 'optometrists', who complete your sight test and issue your prescription. Both can be found in the same high street practice, which is why the practice may be described as an optician's.

An optometrist can do much more than prescribe glasses. They examine the eyes to detect vision problems, injury, eye disease and even some general health problems. They can provide advice on maintaining good eye health and can give you information and help answer questions on all things eye and vision related.

Optometrists study at university for at least three years and must participate in a period of clinical training in practice and assessment, before qualifying. Once qualified and registered to practice, they may specialise in areas such as contact lenses, children's eye care or in eye conditions such as glaucoma, where damage to the nerve inside the eye causes gradual sight loss.

Top 5 ways in which your optometrist can help you:

- 1: Help you to see clearly. Optometrists test people's sight and can prescribe and advise on suitable glasses, contact lenses and other visual aids.
- 2: Detect signs of eye disease. They examine patients in order to identify any eye conditions or diseases, and can sometimes manage or treat them, or refer you to other eye health specialists. Some optometrists can prescribe medicines for specific eye conditions.
- 3: Assess how well your visual system (eyes, brain and eye muscles) is working. This may include tests to assess how well your eyes work together, how well they can

distinguish different colours and measure your peripheral vision.

4: Detect signs of general health problems. They may identify signs detected inside your eye that can indicate general health problems, such as high blood pressure or diabetes.

5: They can provide information and education. Optometrists have a wealth of knowledge on all things eye and vision related. An optometrist is able to give the advice and information people need to make informed decisions about their sight, eye health and visual wellbeing.

Going to an optometrist saves NHS resources

Did you know that increasing numbers of optometrists offer a menu of services for all things eye related? These can be clinics specifically for people suffering from dry eye, to appointments for those affected by a red and painful eye.

In Scotland, Wales and some parts of England, optometrists can provide health service-funded care, commonly called 'minor eye condition services'. These services are to help people affected by problems such as styes or conjunctivitis.

Not only is it often closer and more convenient to visit an optometrist, but community optometrists providing these services free up the time of GPs and ophthalmologists (specialist eye doctors) saving health service resources.

Where will you find an optometrist?

Optometrists work in community practices, hospital clinics and may visit your home or day centre. Some optometrists work behind the scenes in research, training and public health policy. A growing number of optometrists work in hospitals and specialist clinics, from eye casualty to clinics for people affected by glaucoma or other eye conditions. ■

Dry eye: the most common eye condition no-one has heard of

WRITTEN BY:
JOANNA BRADLEY
Head of Patient Support Services,
International Glaucoma Association



Dry eye affects one in three people over the age of 65 and can permanently affect vision in serious cases, yet many people have never even heard of it. What is it and how can you look after your eyes?

Dry eye syndrome is a common eye disorder that can make your eyes feel dry, scratchy and irritated, or very watery, and they can feel heavy and tired at the end of the day. Anyone can get dry eye, but it's more common in women and those over 65.

One in every three people over the age of 65 experiences problems with dry eyes. It is worsened by time spent in front of computer screens and in air-conditioned environments.

Dry eye syndrome and glaucoma commonly appear together. Studies suggest that 50-60% of people who are being treated for glaucoma also have dry eye syndrome and, at the IGA, we're often asked about it.

Unfortunately, though, many people still don't know this frustrating eye condition exists - not helped by its singularly unhelpful name.

What causes dry eye?

Dry eye is caused by problems with tear production. Tears are made up of three components: a mucous inner layer, an aqueous (watery) layer and an oily outer layer.

A smooth layer of tears is essential for sharp vision and the symptoms of dry eye vary depending on which layer is affected. If the oily outer layer is not working, the watery tears evaporate too quickly, causing more of the aqueous layer to be produced, hence the watery eyes.

In most cases, dry eye causes mild discomfort but, if severe, it can be painful and can even cause permanent damage to the eye surface. It very rarely causes long-term problems with sight but can cause fluctuating blurriness.

“Dry eye is worsened by time spent in front of computer screens and in air-conditioned environments.”

Symptoms of dry eye

The most common symptoms include:

- Eyes feel heavy and tired
- Difficulty reading or working on the computer
- Blurry vision
- Excessive eye watering
- Discomfort when wearing contact lenses
- Stinging or burning eyes
- A sandy or gritty feeling
- Pain and redness

If any of these symptoms are familiar, fear not. Dry eye disease can be successfully managed, although it is a chronic condition and may need several different treatments.

What can I do about dry eye?

Treating dry eye syndrome early is important because it can prevent permanent harm to the surface of the eye and so avoid damage to vision. The most common treatment is with artificial tears, a type of eye drop that is widely available without prescription. Other treatment options include steroid eye drops if the surface of the eye has become inflamed. If your symptoms are severe, contact your optometrist, GP or pharmacist for advice.

There are also lifestyle changes that can help. Managing dry eye

involves improving tear production, reducing evaporation and reducing symptoms, so:

- Drink lots of water
- Get plenty of sleep
- If using a screen for a long periods of time, remember to blink(!)
- Avoid alcohol, spicy foods, smoking or smoky areas
- Protect your eyes on windy day by wearing glasses or sunglasses
- Avoid air-conditioning and draughts, and consider using a humidifier to put more water into the air
- Try massaging your eye lids gently with a clean warm cloth. ■

For more information about glaucoma or dry eye, call our helpline 01233 64 81 70 or visit www.iga.org.uk to download or order free patient information booklets.

The International Glaucoma Association (IGA) is the charity for people with glaucoma. We fund vital glaucoma research, raise awareness to prevent needless glaucoma sight loss, and help people to live well with glaucoma by providing advice and support. For more information please visit iga.org.uk

Read more at healthawareness.co.uk

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Preservative-free eye drops are the future

With up to a third of the UK population suffering from dry eye, correct treatment with lubricating eye drops is needed to prevent further worsening of symptoms.

WRITTEN BY:
MR SAURABH GHOSH
Consultant Ophthalmologist



Dry eye is a very common condition that can vary from mild symptoms to sight-threatening consequences. It is often underdiagnosed, as many sufferers do not seek medical attention.¹

Treatment is readily available and can be very effective, but if the wrong treatment is used, symptoms can be made worse. Great care is needed when choosing the correct dry eye drop – the right drop for the right patient.

Tears are the natural protectors of the eye; they provide lubrication and without them, we can experience discomfort and vision impairment.

Tears are produced in the tear gland found under the upper eye lid and are spread across the surface by blinking – a process similar to that of windscreen wipers on your car.

Tears have a surprisingly complex structure, any abnormalities of which could be detrimental to the effectiveness of the eye.²

Dry eyes can feel gritty and may sting

Dry eye occurs when the gland producing tears begins to fail (often as a result of age or illness), or when the tears evaporate too quickly.³

Sufferers often note a grittiness or stinging, which is only partially relieved upon blinking. They often find this is worse after reading or prolonged viewing of screens, because when we concentrate, we naturally blink less, which means our eyes become drier.

Dry eye can be very severe and, if not properly treated, can result in permanent eye damage. Although most people have mild to moderate symptoms, even these can have significant effects on daily life, so it is important to address symptoms from the point of onset.⁴

Preservatives may worsen dry eye if frequent or long-term use is necessary

Current treatment is well estab-

“Most eye drops contain preservatives, which can sometimes make symptoms of dry-eye worse.”

lished and very effective, essentially replacing the lack of tears through the addition of artificial tear drops. There are several different types and treatment regimes available and most people are able to manage symptoms using eyedrops when required.

There is, however, a potential paradox with dry eye treatments in that most eye drops contain preservatives, which can sometimes make symptoms of dry-eye worse.

Historically, preservatives have been necessary to prevent bacterial contamination of the solution in the bottle and, when used short-term, these preservatives have the desired effect and generally cause minimal harm.

However, preservatives have a detergent-like action, meaning they disrupt the tear film and damage

the delicate cells lining the front of the eye. This cell damage results in inflammation, which further damages the tear film and the cells it should protect.

Thus, when used longer-term, and frequently, preservatives can cause further damage to the eye. Since dry eye is a life-long condition stemming from an already impaired ocular surface, a vicious cycle ensues; preservative-containing dry eye treatments worsen the symptoms, which leads to further discomfort and further use of the damaging eye drops.

New bottles prevent bacteria contaminating the solution

A new generation of bottles, that allow eye drops to be free from preservatives in a multi-dose dropper bottle, have revolutionised the treatment of dry eye.

The bottles prevent bacterial entry, and therefore contamination of the solution in the bottle. Without inclusion of potentially damaging

preservatives, the dry eye products can help stabilise the tear film and protect the ocular surface.

The vicious cycle is broken, and an environment can be created that allows cells to function correctly, reducing inflammation and discomfort.

Preservative-free (PF) dry eye drops are, unsurprisingly, becoming the mainstay of dry eye treatment;⁵ they can be used as frequently as required, often with contact lenses and by those with allergic eye disease.

They are now available in multi-dose dropper bottles, which are convenient, last up to two months and help to overcome the environmental burden of single-use plastic unit dose vials. ■

Read more at aspirepharma.co.uk

1: dtb.bmj.com/content/54/1/9 2: www.glaucoma-association.com/media/wysiwyg/Leaflet_PDF_Files/Dry_Eye_Download.pdf 3: bestpractice.bmj.com/topics/en-gb/962 4: iovs.arvojournals.org/article.aspx?articleid=2166230 5: www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1185/030079906X132640

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If you have any questions regarding your treatment, speak to your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

Reporting side effects

If you get any side effects, talk to your doctor, pharmacist or nurse. You can also report side effects directly via the Yellow Card Scheme at www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard. By reporting side effects you can help provide more information on the safety of this product.



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Tunnel vision to Tokyo

WRITTEN BY:
SOULEYMAN BAH
Para-Athlete,
Entrepreneur, Disability Activist



Souleyman Bah is a 20-year-old Para Athlete for Great Britain, running in the T13 100m. He has represented his country at the junior Paralympics and won a gold medal in 2015. Now, he has set his sights on the Tokyo 2020 games.

Souleyman was born in Guinea (west Africa) but in 2004, after his parents realised he had some form of visual impairment – as well as a lack of support from the education system – his family moved to the UK to seek more information and a better education for him.

At the age of six, he was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa (RP) and cone rod dystrophy and explains that he sees in a form of tunnel vision with no sight in the dark, referred to as 'night blindness'. He says that he's inspired by late musician, Ray Charles, because 'he made blindness cool and achieved immense success despite his disability'.

Trial treatment has stopped my vision deteriorating

Souleyman took part in a one-of-a-kind medical trial involving a gene therapy treatment, which is an operation that seeks to pause – or even possibly improve – symptoms for those with RP.

He underwent this treatment in 2017 and reports that, since the eye was operated on, he has seen no deterioration of sight, whereas the non-operated eye has seen severe decrease in sight due to the natural effects of RP, which always end up in complete blindness.

Souleyman also is currently experiencing Charles Bonnet Syndrome (CBS), which is a condition that affects individuals who are approaching early- to mid-stages of blindness and experience flashing lights and images, which can sometimes be a frightening experience.

Looking to the future, Souleyman has started his own motivational speaking company (Vision Beyond Sight) where he travels all over the country delivering assemblies and sport sessions to children and young adults to inspire them as well as educating them about physical and mental health. ■

HEADSHOT © CHANNEL 4'S
THE UNDATEABLES

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk



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Eye care in the digital age

WRITTEN BY:
ROSIE GAVZEY
Optometrist and Trustee,
Eye Health UK



Research shows we now spend more time looking at a screen than we do sleeping. Eye Health UK explores what increasing screen use means for our eye health.

According to the communications regulator, Ofcom, UK adults spend an average of eight hours and 41 minutes a day on digital devices, compared with the average night's sleep of eight hours and 21 minutes.

With such high levels of screen time it's important we're all aware of the impact this can have on our eye health and understand some simple steps we can take to minimise the effect.

Screen fatigue

Looking at screens will not permanently damage your eyes; however, it may cause eye strain, headaches, and trigger episodes of visual stress, all symptoms of asthenopia.

These reactions to prolonged screen use are commonly known as 'screen fatigue' and while symptoms tend to subside after resting your eyes, screen fatigue can be uncomfortable and frustrating.

Extended screen time is also said to exacerbate existing eye conditions such as uncorrected myopia (short-sightedness).

Eye complaints

Symptoms associated with staring at a screen for long stretches without taking breaks can include:

- Tired eyes. Ocular muscles, like any others, can get tired from continued focus on close work.
- Viewing a screen for extended periods can lead to headaches and concentration difficulties.
- Blurred vision. Gazing at a fixed distance for an extended period can cause your focus to spasm or 'lock up'. This can cause your

vision to blur temporarily when you look away from the screen.

- Dry eyes. Studies consistently show that people's blink rate drops significantly when concentrating on a digital screen. A reduced blink rate can speed up evaporation of the eyes' tear film resulting in dry, itchy, red or even watery eyes.

Minimise the effects

There is much you can do to ease the effects of screen fatigue:

- Take frequent breaks. Follow the 20-20-20 rule: look away from the screen every 20 minutes, focus on an object 20 feet away, for at least 20 seconds. As well as being good for your eye health, frequent breaks can help your productivity and mental health – giving you time to pause, reflect and breathe.
- Remember to blink. Staring at a screen can reduce your blink rate by as much as 60%. Plants placed around your home or office can help improve humidity and minimise dry eye symptoms.
- A warm compress applied to the eyes may provide relief. Your optometrist or pharmacist may also recommend a spray or drops to help manage symptoms of dry and irritated eyes.
- Screen positioning. Make sure the top of the screen on your desktop or laptop computer is at eye level. Having to look up at a screen opens eyes wider and dries them out quicker.
- One rule of thumb when thinking about where and how to position screens is the

1 - 2 - 10 rule: mobile phones ideally at one foot (30cm), desktop devices and laptops at two feet (60 - 75cms), and roughly 10 feet for TV screens (depending on how big the screen is).

- Adjusting the font size so you can comfortably read it (12pt min) may also help reduce screen fatigue.
- Spotlight on lighting. To cut down on glare and eye fatigue, a study published in the Journal of Ophthalmology & Research says the level of lighting in a room when using a computer or other screen should be roughly half what it would be for other activities such as craft-work or writing on paper.
- Try to position computers so that light from uncovered windows, lamps and overhead light fixtures doesn't shine directly on the screens. And, keep your screen clean – finger marks cause reflections!

DON'T FORGET: If you need glasses specifically for VDU work, your employer should cover the cost. ■

Info box

Eye Health UK have teamed up with Vision Express during National Eye Health Week to launch The Big Blink, an initiative designed to help reduce prevalence of screen fatigue. For more information visit visionmatters.org.uk/thebigblink

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk



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Losing your vision can mean losing your confidence



WRITTEN BY:
LESLEY CARTER
Senior Health Influencing Manager,
Age UK

Eye diseases don't always cause obvious symptoms. An eye test by an optician doesn't just check to see whether you need glasses – it's also an important check on the health of your eyes.

Vision loss among older people is a major healthcare problem. Approximately one person in three has some form of vision-reducing eye disease by the age of 65.

Most people find that as they age, close-up vision blurs, tear ducts function less well, and eyes can get dry and inflamed. Cataracts may make your sight cloudy and hazy and cause changes to the lens in your eye.

Keeping our eyes healthy is important as untreated vision problems can make day-to-day life harder. Vision problems can lead to higher risk of falls, loss of confidence, which can affect going out, our confidence, our wellbeing, reading and following instructions, which could have serious consequences i.e. misreading prescriptions and taking the wrong medications.

Eye diseases don't always cause obvious symptoms and regular eye tests (every two years or more often in some cases) are key to maintaining eye health as we age. Opticians can detect small changes at an early stage, usually before we have noticed any changes. Opticians will recognise and advise treatment and follow up for common, age-related conditions such as macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataract and diabetic eye screening. Anyone over 60 is entitled to a free eye test.

We can't correct our vision without professional help, and there's no quick-and-easy fix for eyesight problems but here are tips to keep your eyes healthy:

- Get regular eye tests
- Wear sunglasses to protect your eyes from the sun
- Eat healthily, particularly plenty of fruit and vegetables, which have specific nutrients that are important for eye health
- Stop smoking. Smoking is harmful to the eyes – research has shown that smoking increases the risk of age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma and cataracts. Cigarette smoke irritates the eyes and will worsen dry eyes. ■

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk

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Short-sightedness is now a global epidemic



WRITTEN BY:
DAVID CARTWRIGHT
Optometrist and Chairman,
Eye Health UK

It's predicted that half the people on the planet will be short-sighted (myopic) by 2050 and, most worryingly, levels of 'high myopia' – a prescription of -6 or more – are also on the rise. This is a concern because 'high myopia' can increase your risk of sight-threatening conditions such as retinal detachment, glaucoma and cataracts.

Myopia, also called short-sightedness, is a common eye condition that causes objects that are far away to appear blurred, while close objects can be seen clearly. It currently affects around one in three adults in the UK.

An ongoing study in the UK, known as the NICER study, recently demonstrated that the prevalence of myopia among school-aged children has doubled over the past 50 years and children are becoming myopic at an earlier age than in the past. Today one in five British teens is myopic.

Lower your risk of myopia

Genetic, ethnic, and environmental risk factors all play a part in the onset of short-sightedness.

Having myopic parents can increase your risk of developing myopia, if one parent is myopic, there is a three times risk that the child will be. This risk factor can increase to between five and eight times when both parents are myopic.

However, the current epidemic is thought to be 'acquired rather than genetic'.

Intensive near work (writing, reading, and working on a computer) has been associated with myopia developing in children. Increasingly sedentary social lives of children and young people may also be contributing to the increase.

However, these risk factors can be offset by spending time outside

“Myopia among school-aged children has doubled over the past 50 years.”

– research shows children who spend more time outdoors are less likely to be or become myopic, even if there is a genetic risk.

Importance of the outdoors

It is known that being outdoors can reduce a child's risk of developing myopia, yet youngsters simply aren't outdoors enough. A recent study commissioned by the National Trust found that children spend half the time playing outside that their parents did. Today, youngsters spend just four hours a week outdoors compared with 8.2 hours for their parents when they were children.

Parental anxiety, demanding homework schedules and the rise of electronic entertainment are increasingly keeping children indoors. But, balancing indoor and outdoor pursuits is important – researchers have found that the lack of time children spend outdoors, rather than the increased time they spend on near work, is the more important factor in preventing and slowing myopia.

Two hours a day spent playing outdoors could be really beneficial when it comes to kids' eye health.

Crucial sight tests

Early intervention can help slow

down further increases in myopia, so regular sight tests, at school entry then once every two years unless advised otherwise by your optometrist, are important, especially for primary-aged children and teens.

Myopia control as there is no cure

There is no cure for myopia, but certain treatments are known to slow down the rate of progression in children.

Recent research has found that soft multifocal contact lenses—where the centre zone of the lens gives clear far-distance vision and the peripheral zones help with close-up focusing – are effective in reducing myopia progression in children who wear these lenses daily.

Contact lenses, inducing a change in how the eye focuses, reduce abnormal eye growth, which in turn reduces the prescription.

Other therapy options include OrthoK, atropine and spectacles.

The best myopia control will depend on a number of factors: age, prescription (level of myopia and astigmatism), eye shape, pupil size, eye sensitivity, compliance with wearing and caring for your lenses and your lifestyle.

Your dispensing optician or contact lens practitioner will guide you through the options and help you select the most appropriate solution for you or your child. ■

Read more at
healthawareness.co.uk



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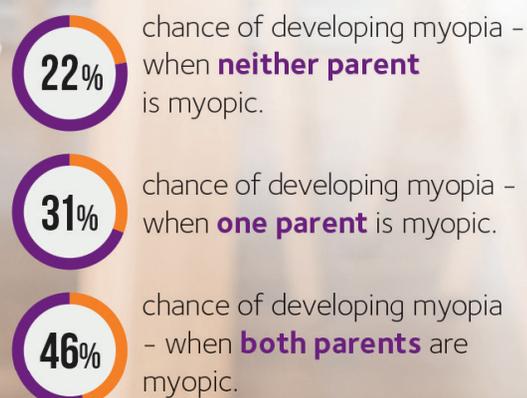
WHAT IS SHORT-SIGHTEDNESS?

'Short-sightedness' is a common term for myopia – a common eye condition which causes distant objects to be blurry and out of focus, while close objects can be viewed more clearly.

Myopia is a common eye condition in both adults and children. Currently myopia affects around 80 million children around the world,² a figure that is set to rise sharply by 2050.³ The average onset age of myopia is also getting progressively younger; in 1983 it was eleven-years-old, whereas in 2000 it was eight-years-old.⁴

GENETICS

The risk of myopia in children increases when parents are myopic.¹



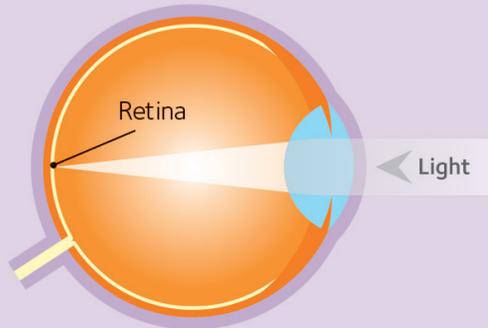


CONTROLLING MYOPIA IN CHILDREN IS IMPORTANT.

As children's eyes grow and their myopia increases so does their dependency on glasses. This can reduce the child's ability to participate actively in sports and other activities.

Increasing myopia can also lead to eye health problems in the future. For example, you are **16 times more at risk** of retinal detachment if you have a high myopic prescription of $-6.00DS$.⁵

TYPICAL EYE

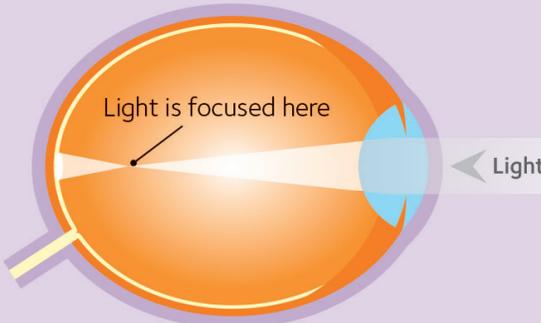


Clear vision



Light focuses on the retina (the light-sensitive lining inside the eye) for clear vision.

MYOPIC EYE



Blurred vision



If the eye grows too long, light is focused in front of the retina making distance vision blurry.

Introducing **MiSight® 1 day** – the first soft contact lens with a proven ability to slow the progression of myopia.^{6*}

MiSight® 1 day is a daily disposable contact lens suitable for myopic children as young as eight-years-old. The lens is designed using ActivControl® technology which allows children to see clearly while slowing their myopia progression and eyeball growth.

Wearing **MiSight® 1 day** contact lenses is shown to reduce myopia progression

in children by 59% on average, reducing their reliance on vision correction.^{6†}

MiSIGHT® 1 DAY LENSES ARE CHILD-FRIENDLY.

Over a three-year clinical study **MiSight® 1 day** contact lenses in children aged 8–15 years.⁶

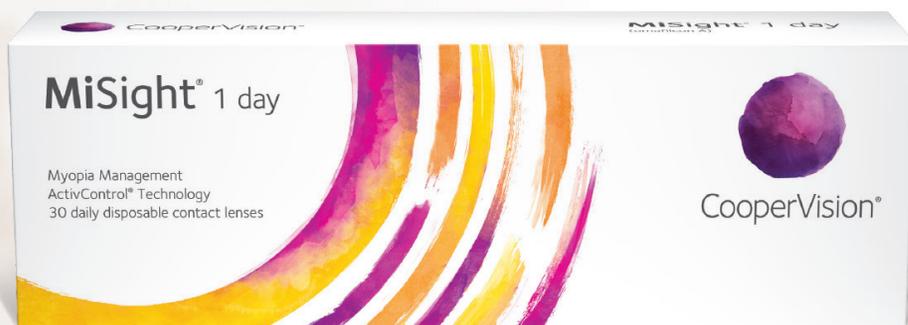
90% of children said they preferred

wearing their **MiSight® 1 day** contact lenses over wearing their spectacles.

90% of children could handle **MiSight® 1 day** lenses on their own[‡]

100% of parents said their children were happy with the experience of wearing contact lenses, including comfort, vision, ease of use and freedom from spectacles.

Find your nearest **MiSight® 1 day** stockist at www.coopervision.co.uk/find-an-optician



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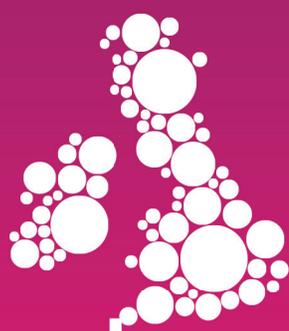


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