

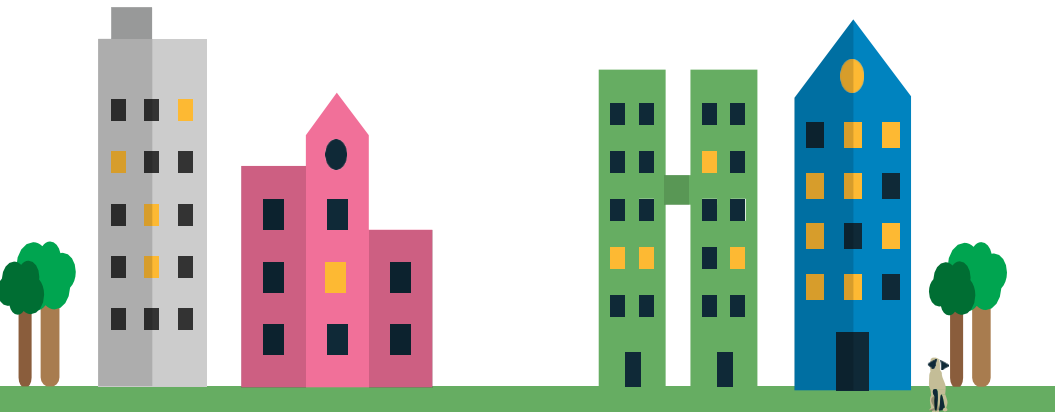


A GUIDE TO HEALTHY VISION

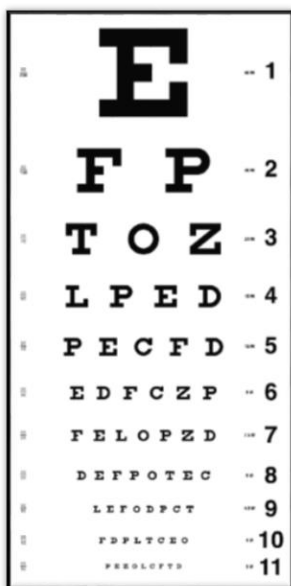
About CommonHealth

CommonHealth is Virginia's employee wellness program. Since 1986, CommonHealth has promoted best practices in health and wellness to employees in the workplace. More than 500 agency locations in the Commonwealth of Virginia have active CommonHealth programs.

CommonHealth is available to ALL employees, including part-time and wage employees, retirees and employee dependents 18+ years. Enrollment in a state health insurance program is not required to participate.



You can protect your vision



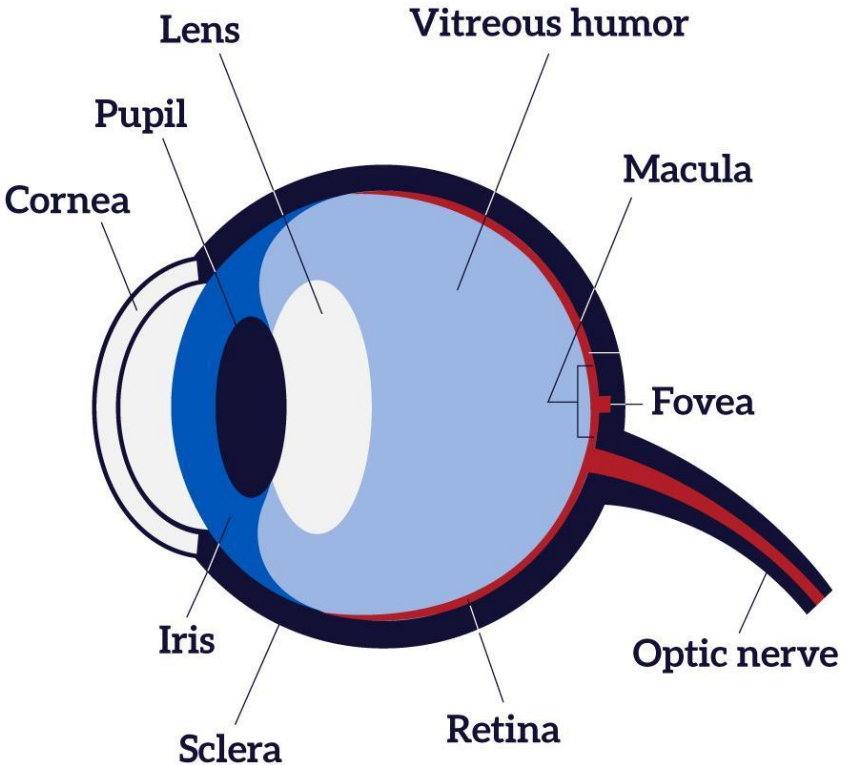
If your eyes feel healthy, it's easy to assume they are healthy. Many eye diseases don't have any warning signs — so you could have an eye problem and not know it.

Protecting your eyes from the sun and from trauma are two ways to preserve our sight. Just as important is how we take care of ourselves overall. Eating right, exercise, and regular checkups can go a long way to prevent ocular health problems later in life.

This guide to “Wise Eyes” helps you play it safe with your sight to preserve and protect it for a lifetime.

Common conditions

The number of people with age related eye conditions and diseases will double by 2050. Your vision changes as you age, but vision loss and blindness are not a normal part of aging.



Learn what to look for and what you can do about it.



This is unimpaired vision.



Glaucoma

The nerve connecting the eye to the brain is damaged, usually due to high eye pressure. The most common type often has no symptoms other than slow vision loss.



Age Related Macular Degeneration

Loss in the center of the field of vision. In dry macular degeneration, the center of the retina deteriorates. With wet macular degeneration, leaky blood vessels grow under the retina.



Cataract

Clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye. Most cataracts develop slowly over the course of years. The main symptom is blurry vision.



Diabetic Retinopathy

Damage to the blood vessels in the tissue at the back of the eye (retina). Poorly controlled blood sugar is a risk factor. Early symptoms include floaters, blurriness, dark areas of vision, and difficulty perceiving colors. Can cause blindness.

What to expect from your eyes as you age

Your eyes change as you age. Eye problems can develop at any age though, so know what to look for.



Decrease in near vision

During their 40s, most people notice that seeing objects closer than 2 feet becomes difficult. This change in vision, called presbyopia, occurs because the lens of the eye stiffens. Normally, the lens changes its shape to help the eye focus. A stiffer lens makes focusing on close objects harder. Ultimately, almost everyone gets presbyopia and needs magnifying reading glasses. People who need glasses to see distant objects may need to wear bifocals or glasses with variable focus lenses.

Change in color perception

Cells in the retina that are responsible for normal color vision can decline in sensitivity as we age. Color will be less bright and the contrast between colors can be less noticeable. It may be challenging to distinguish colors, such as blue from black, or to see where an object ends and its background begins.

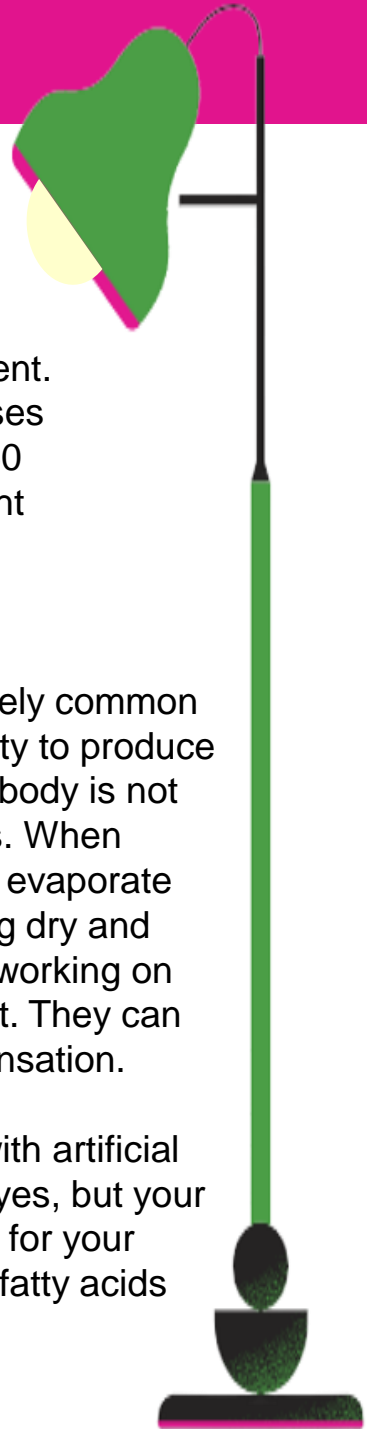
Need for brighter light

As we age, seeing in dim light becomes more difficult because the lens tends to become less transparent. A denser lens means less light passes through to the retina. On average, 60 year olds need three times more light to read than 20 year olds.

Dry Eye Syndrome

Dry eye is a condition that is extremely common as we age. Your body loses the ability to produce enough moisture. That includes the body is not producing enough tears for the eyes. When insufficient tears are produced, they evaporate more quickly leaving the eyes feeling dry and uncomfortable. Dry eyes can make working on the computer or reading very difficult. They can also lead to a stinging or burning sensation.

Dry eye syndrome is often treated with artificial eye drops that act as tears for the eyes, but your diet can also support more moisture for your eyes. Look for sources of Omega-3 fatty acids on page 18 of this booklet.



The Amsler grid

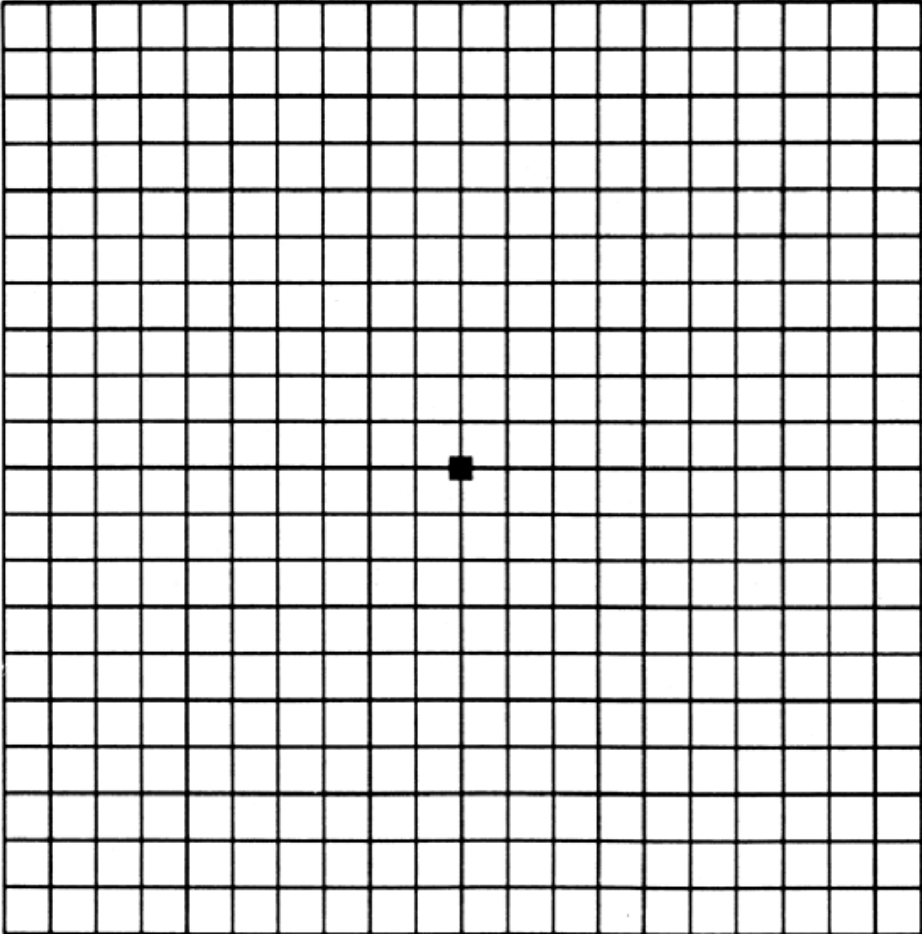
The Amsler grid is a tool that eye doctors use to detect vision problems resulting from damage to the macula (the central part of the retina) or the optic nerve. If you are at risk for macular degeneration or other eye diseases, you can use this chart at home to monitor your vision. But using the chart doesn't mean you should skip regular visits to your eye doctor, because you can easily miss signs that only a trained eye care practitioner will find.

How to use the Amsler grid test

1. Test your eyes under normal room lighting used for reading.
2. Wear eyeglasses you normally wear for reading (even if you wear only store-bought reading glasses).
3. Hold the Amsler grid approximately 14 to 16 inches from your eyes.
4. Test each eye separately: Cup your hand over one eye while testing the other eye.
5. Keep your eye focused on the dot in the center of the grid and answer these questions:
 - Do any of the lines in the grid appear wavy, blurred or distorted?
 - Do all the boxes in the grid look square and the same size?
 - Are there any "holes" (missing areas) or dark areas in the grid?
 - Can you see all corners and sides of the grid (while keeping your eye on the central dot)?
6. Switch to the other eye and repeat.

IMPORTANT — Report any irregularities to your eye doctor immediately. Mark areas of the Amsler grid that you're not seeing properly (print two grids if you notice problems in each eye), and bring the grid(s) with you when you visit your eye doctor.

Please note: If you have an urgent question about your eye health, contact your eye doctor immediately. This booklet is designed to provide general information about vision. It is not intended to provide medical advice. If you suspect that you have a vision problem or a condition that requires attention, consult with an eye care professional for advice on the treatment of your own specific condition and for your own particular needs.



Chronic health & Ocular health

Some chronic health issues have a higher likelihood of affecting your vision.

Diabetes can drastically affect your vision. Diabetic retinopathy is an eye condition that can cause vision loss and blindness in people who have diabetes. Diabetic retinopathy is caused by high blood sugar due to diabetes. Over time, having too much sugar in your blood can damage your retina — the part of your eye that detects light and sends signals to your brain through the optic nerve in the back of your eye.

Problems with your blood pressure can be linked to a host of health issues, including diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. Over time, the issues with your blood pressure can result in damage to the blood vessels in and around the eyes.

Lyme disease can potentially result in eye infections that cause serious vision loss. In addition to conjunctivitis, the inflammation can also affect the middle portion of the eye (uveitis), the optic nerve, and even the blood vessels of the retinas.

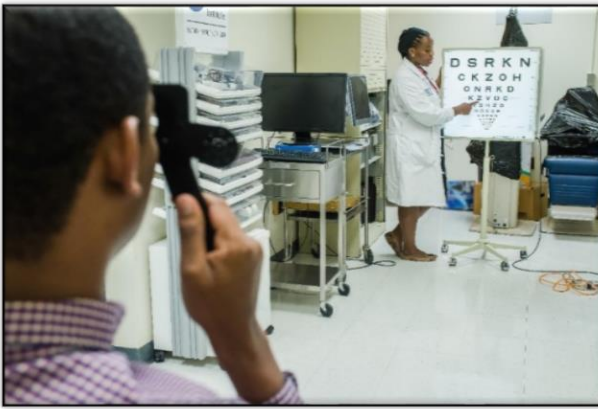


Many kinds of autoimmune diseases can impact your vision. In many cases, problems with the eyes are among the first symptoms of autoimmune conditions. Early on, patients may experience red eyes, itchy eyes, or frequent dry eye. If the condition is undiagnosed or untreated, it's possible for patients to experience eye pain, light sensitivity, changes to vision quality, and even vision loss.

Rosacea can affect vision. When the rosacea is located around the eyes, it can result in dry eye, itchiness, burning sensations, and redness of the eyes. The condition can also result in swelling of the eyelids and increased sensitivity to light.

Liver disease such as cirrhosis can lead to a number of eye problems, such as dry eye and itchiness of the eyes, as well as collections of fat on a person's eyelids. Corneal damage and lens damage can occur if the condition goes untreated.

People who suffer from conditions that cause abnormally shaped blood cells run a number of health risks. For people with sickle cell disease, these abnormal blood cells can lead to damaged blood vessels in the eyes, eventually resulting in blindness if not dealt with in a timely manner.



Getting older increases your risk of some eye diseases, so no matter what your age, make a point to take care of your eyes.

You might also have a higher risk of some eye diseases if you:

- Are overweight or obese
- Have a family history of eye disease
- Are African American, Hispanic, or Native American

If you are worried you might be at risk for some eye diseases, talk to your doctor. You may be able to take steps to lower your risk.

It is very important to know your family's health history. Some eye diseases and conditions run in families, like age-related macular degeneration or Glaucoma. Be sure to tell your eye doctor if any eye diseases run in your family.

Your risk factors

Take care of you

The link between your overall health and your vision is strong. Work to lower your risk for conditions that can lead to eye problems.



Eat Well

Focus on fruits, vegetables, lean meats, fish, nuts, and seeds as parts of a balanced diet to support vision.



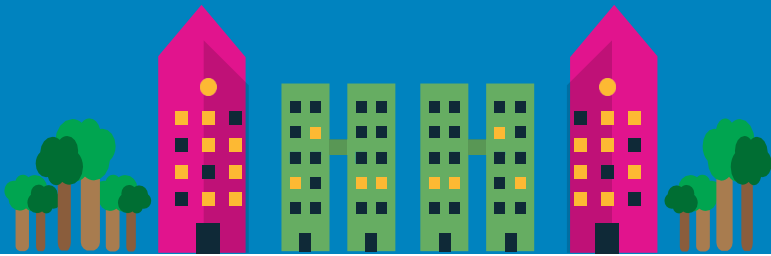
Get Active

Moving keeps your body well and helps manage chronic disease that can affect vision.

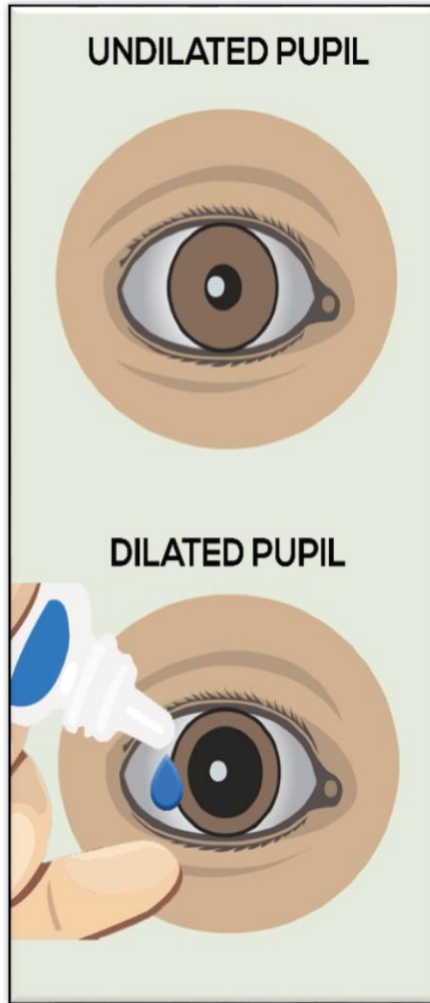


Quit Smoking

Smoking increases your risk for macular degeneration, cataracts, and it can harm the optic nerve.



Dilated eye exam



Getting a dilated eye exam is simple and painless — and it is the single best thing you can do for your eye health! Even if your eyes feel healthy, you could have a problem and not know it. That's because many eye diseases don't have any symptoms or warning signs. A dilated eye exam is the only way to check for many eye diseases early on, when they are easier to treat.

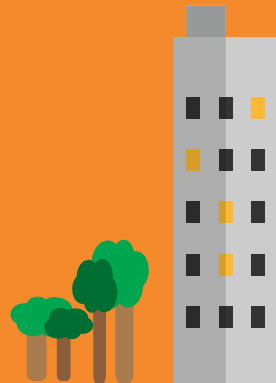
How often you need a dilated eye exam depends on your risk for eye disease. Talk to your doctor about what is right for you. Most people with diabetes or high blood pressure need to get a dilated eye exam at least once a year

During the exam your doctor will give you some eye drops to dilate (widen) your pupil. This helps the doctor see inside your eye and check for problems with the inner parts of your eye. Dilating your pupil lets more light into your eye, like opening a door lets light into a dark room.

How to schedule an appointment

Visit dhrm.virginia.gov and select State Employees from the menu. Next choose Benefits, State Health Benefits, Active Employees, Plan Choices, and your plan name.

From there you'll be able to see your insurance provider's plan-at-a-glance to know which services are covered. Search for an optometrist that works with your insurance plan.



Food and your eyes

If you took inventory on foods you normally eat, would you say your eyes have all the nutrients they need to help prevent cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma and other vision woes? Did you know that eating healthy foods could help protect your eye sight?

Foods with vitamins C and E, zinc, lutein, zeaxanthin, and omega-3 fatty acids are linked to lower risk for age-related macular degeneration, cataract and perhaps even dry eye.



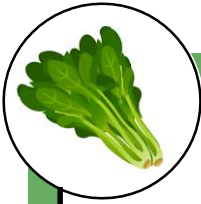
Dark leafy greens, sweet potatoes, oranges, whole grains, and healthy fatty fish are all parts of an eye conscious diet.

Fruits and vegetables are some of the best foods for eye health because they are full of antioxidants. Put simply, antioxidants are foods that keep us healthy by delaying or slowing down oxidation, which causes cell damage and cell aging. Regularly enjoying a piece of fruit and a side of vegetables can help decrease your chance of developing cataracts and other vision problems.

While you can get supplements in pill form at your local pharmacy, antioxidants are most beneficial when consumed from fruits and vegetables and other whole foods. Studies using supplements have not shown the same successful results in preventing eye-related problems. Antioxidant supplements also have not been shown to help prevent cataracts.

So load up on vegetables and delicious fruits! Fresh and frozen are great choices, but canned vegetables that are low in sodium are a good choice too. You will be doing your eyes and your health a favor.

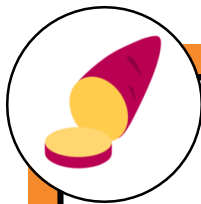
Get ideas about how you can add more eye healthy nutrients to your diet.



Lutein & Zeaxanthin

Protects eyes from sun damage & aging

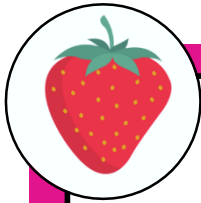
Leafy greens, broccoli, peas, kiwi, red grapes, yellow squash (eat with healthy fats)



Beta-carotene & Vitamin A

Prevents dry eyes and night blindness

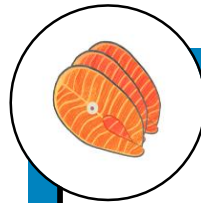
Sweet potatoes, carrots, butternut squash, dark leafy greens, liver, milk, eggs



Vitamin C

Lowers risk of cataracts

Strawberries, bell peppers, oranges, kiwi, grapefruit, cantaloupe



Omega-3 Fatty Acids

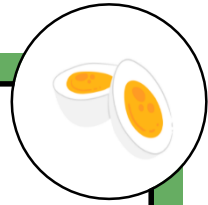
Lowers risk for high eye pressure/glaucoma

Salmon, sardines, trout, walnuts, flaxseed, chia seeds

Zinc

Keeps the eye's tissue healthy

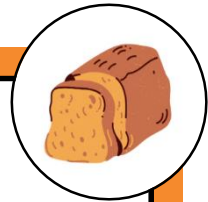
Lean meat, seafood, eggs, cheese, soybeans, peanuts, bran, wheat germ



Thiamin

Decreased risk of cataract and glaucoma

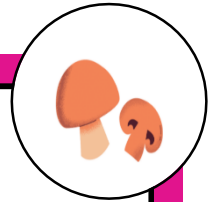
Enriched and fortified whole grains, eggs, pork, legumes, seeds, nuts



Vitamin D

Prevention of macular degeneration

Fresh fish, eggs, mushrooms, milk, yogurt, fortified cereal, pork



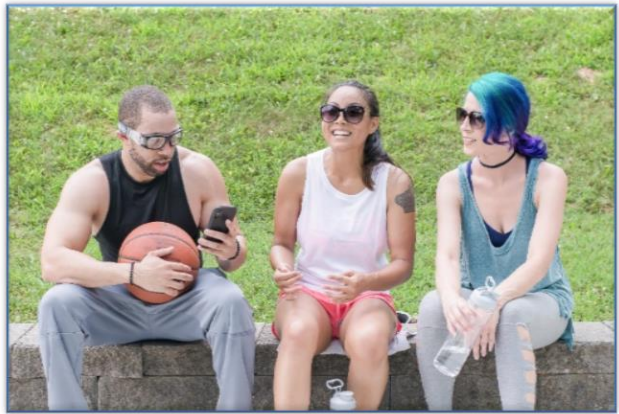
Vitamin E

Prevention of macular degeneration

Walnuts, almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds, dark leafy greens, pumpkin, peanuts



Safety Glasses



An approximate 125,000 eye injuries happen in the home every year, and over 40,000 sports-related eye injuries take place yearly.

While the numbers are startling, even more eye-catching is that eye injuries are the most preventable cause of blindness. Diseases like glaucoma and macular degeneration don't cause as many cases of blindness as eye injuries.

Safety experts and medical professionals believe that 90% of all eye injuries are preventable by wearing appropriate safety eyewear.

Protective eyewear includes safety glasses, goggles, face shields and side shields designed for specific activities. Common hazards include chemicals, corneal flash burns, pollen, dust, and the blunt force of large objects.

A big key in safety eyewear protecting eyes against hazards involves taking all the potential dangers of a situation into account and wearing the appropriate eyewear.



In the workplace, this means having and following recommendations of safety experts at OSHA as well as performing regular safety audits.

At home, it involves at a minimum wearing standard safety eyewear for yard work, house cleaning and whenever working with power tools.

During recreation, it means using what experts recommend for specific activities.



Though hazards sometimes present themselves unexpectedly, a person can be sufficiently equipped when they are most likely to occur.

Eye Q & A

QUESTION: Do sunglasses really protect my eyes? Yes. Believe it or not, even your eyes can get “sunburned.” Just as UV damage accumulates on skin over a lifetime, this also happens to the eyes. Over time, UV exposure can put you at higher risk for cataracts, thickening of the eye tissue, and skin cancer around the eyes. Lenses with UVA and UVB coatings will reduce those risks. (Polarized lenses reduce glare but don’t offer much additional sight protection.)



QUESTION: Does the tint of my lenses matter? It can. Copper, orange, yellow/amber, and brown lens tints are helpful in low-light conditions because they make an environment appear brighter. They also enhance contrast and depth perception. Additionally, these lens tints block blue light. Blue light scatters easier than other colors and makes focusing on objects difficult. Removing blue light improves sharpness and depth perception and reduces eye fatigue.

QUESTION: How can I address eye strain from computer work? Follow the 20-20-20 rule. We don't blink as much during near-task activities. Dry eyes can be painful and can, in severe cases, lead to scars or ulcers on the cornea or loss of vision. Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, take a 20-second break and look 20 feet into the distance. Your eyes can rest, refocus, and rehydrate with some much-needed blinks. You can also try blue blocking computer glasses. Blue light blocking glasses can help reduce eye strain. Blue light can make it difficult to focus on the screen, making your eyes strain to concentrate. Blue light glasses help increase contrast on your screen, making it easier to focus and subsequently reduce eye strain.



Eye Q & A

QUESTION: Do I wash my hands before or after touching my contacts? Both. Up to 90 percent of wearers don't correctly care for their lenses, according to the CDC. This often results in keratitis, a treatable inflammation of the cornea. Take care: Wash your hands before and after you touch your eyes, and clean your lens case with hot water weekly. If your eyes are red and irritated, wear glasses to give your eyes a break.



QUESTION: Why is smoking such a big deal for my eyes? Smokers are up to four times more likely to go blind in old age. Studies show smoking increases the risk of age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and Dry Eye Syndrome. The good news is that quitting smoking at any age, even later in life, can significantly reduce your risk of developing these conditions. Call Quit Now Virginia (1.800.Quit.Now).

QUESTION: Is it okay to rub my eyes if it feels good? Not really. Vigorous rubbing can cause more damage than relief. Not only will it stretch the ultra-delicate skin around your eyes but it could also cause a corneal abrasion, elevate eye pressure, and cause visual distortions (such as seeing halos). Instead of rubbing, address the source by reducing the exposure to irritants.



QUESTION: Should I blink a lot to get an irritant out of my eyes? No. When soap or another irritant gets in your eyes, use water, not tears, to flush the substance out, especially if it's an alkaline solution (like toothpaste) or a cleaning product (like bleach). Tears can't flush away irritants as quickly or as thoroughly as water can. Hold your face under a running faucet or shower, or pour water onto your eye from a clean cup repeatedly for 15 minutes. If it still stings, call an eye doctor.

Eye Action Plan

Get a Dilated Exam

A dilated eye exam is the only way to check for many eye diseases early on, when they are easier to treat. Track changes in your vision by making sure you've had a complete exam around age 40.

Know What to Look For

Learn what conditions to watch out for by knowing your family history, what is normal and what isn't, and self-monitoring by using the Amsler grid.

Eat Well for Eye Health

Some foods are especially beneficial at helping our vision. Focus on fruits, vegetables, lean meats and fish, and nuts and seeds as part of your balanced diet to support your vision.

Protect Your Eyes

Safety eyewear and sunglasses are the best defense against eye injuries and sun damage. They protect your eyes from a myriad of potential hazards at work, home, and outdoors.

Resources



Health Plans

Visit dhrm.virginia.gov and select *State Employees* from the menu. Next choose *Benefits, State Health Benefits, Active Employees, Plan Choices*, and your plan name.

Eye Health

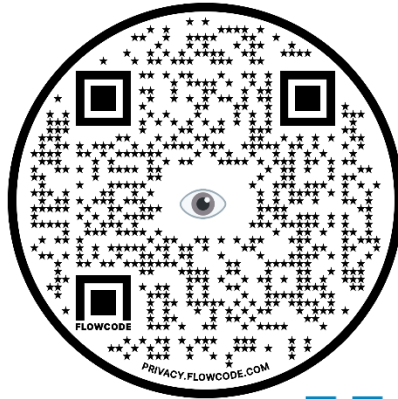
National Eye Institute - nei.nih.gov/
Family Health History Tool –
tinyurl.com/familyhealtheyes

Recipes for Better Vision

eatingwell.com
fruitsandveggies.org

Eye Protection

osha.gov/eye-face-protection



CommonHealth

