



Open Your EYES!

Quick – how much do you know about the health of your eyes?
Answer 'True' or 'False' to the following statements:

1. People who have 20-20 vision have perfect eye health.
2. You only need to see an optometrist for vision concerns or when your eyes hurt.
3. Glaucoma is an eye disease that always makes you blind.
4. Most children eventually outgrow literacy or behavioral problems.
5. There's no connection between what you eat and the health of your eyes.



*The Canadian
Association of
Optometrists*

If you answered 'True' to any of the above, you are taking your eyes for granted. You're probably overlooking the many strains and exertions your eyes suffer throughout the day, plus the importance of regular visits to an optometrist. And your eye health could be suffering as a result.

Setting the record straight

“The eyes are windows to the soul, but they are also windows to how your body is functioning,” says Dr. Joan Hansen, president of the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO). Her organization is committed to helping promote eye health awareness to Canadians and to conveying the message that vision is only one component of healthy eyes – goals that come to the fore every October, during Eye Health Month.

Here are a few truths that you should know about your eye health:

20/20 vision does not equal perfect eye health

20/20 refers to the ability to see an object clearly at a distance of 20 feet. In metric terms, 6/6 vision describes the ability to see objects clearly from 6 meters away. Prescription glasses and contact lenses can help give you 20/20 vision, but seeing well does not mean your eyes are healthy.

Regular eye examinations are essential to your eyes' good health

Every check-up includes a comprehensive assessment of your vision, plus other procedures to make sure your eyes are healthy. With regular visits, optometrists can detect and treat eye diseases before they become serious. Glaucoma, for instance, need not result in blind-

ness. Optometrists can detect this disease at an early stage and help you control it with little or no further vision loss. “Pursuing good health habits will last a lifetime,” Dr. Hansen points out, “but once vision is lost there is often little hope of ever regaining it.”

You can have eye disease without feeling any discomfort

Some serious eye diseases, such as Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) – the leading cause of legal blindness in North America in adults over the age of 55 – can progress without warning or serious symptoms. Your optometrist can detect AMD even before you notice any symptoms, and discuss how you can minimize the possibility of further vision loss. “If undetected within the first six months of onset, AMD can cause irreversible vision loss,” says the AMD Alliance International, a non-profit coalition of the world’s leading vision, seniors and research organizations. “Early detection of AMD is the key to preserving vision. The good news is, detecting AMD is as simple as getting a regular eye exam, and new treatments with more options for patients are on the horizon.”

Your child needs to see well to do well in school

There’s a direct association between eye health and literacy,

learning and behavioral problems. In fact, it’s a fairly common occurrence. “As many as one in six children has a vision problem that can affect their learning in school,” says Dr. Dorrie Morrow, chair of CAO’s Children’s Vision Initiative.

Good-for-your-eyes nutrients

Numerous studies show that a steady intake of the nutrients lutein and zeaxanthin, found in many brightly coloured fruits and vegetables, are a promising means of decreasing the risk of eye diseases such as glaucoma and macular degeneration. Spinach, broccoli, orange peppers, corn, peas, persimmons and tangerines are all excellent sources of these good-for-your-eyes nutrients. As well, most fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamin C, including oranges, grapefruit, strawberries and papaya, as well as green peppers and tomatoes.

Contact lenses are more comfortable, safer and easier to wear than ever

With today’s new materials and lens care technologies, there’s probably a contact lens available to help correct your vision – whether you have nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and/or presbyopia (the loss of ability to focus on reading or close-up activities).

Visit your optometrist regularly

Just as you visit your dentist every six months – whether or not you have a toothache – you need to put your next visit to your optometrist into your calendar.

How often should you go? Infants can have their first visit as early as six months of age. Return with children at age three – sooner if you sense a problem – and then again just before they enter school.

After that, eye examinations should be a part of every child's regular health checklist to ensure they have the basic tools to flourish in school – and acquire good health habits that will last a lifetime.

As for you, go every two years from age 20 to 64, and increase your frequency to annually after age 65 – unless your optometrist advises more frequent exams.

To your good health

At your regular examination, your optometrist can uncover and recommend early treatment for:

- diabetes
- multiple sclerosis
- high blood pressure
- brain tumours and other cancers
- cataracts
- early signs of serious eye disease, such as glaucoma or macular degeneration
- amblyopia (lazy eye)
- strabismus (turned eye)

To your good health

Keep all your scheduled visits with your optometrist to make sure your lenses are not harming your eyes

- Only wear contact lenses that have been specifically prescribed for your use
- NEVER share your lenses with your friends. A contact lens provides a perfect warm, moist environment for bacteria
- Care for cosmetic contact lenses as you would corrective lenses: wash your hands before you handle them, keep them clean, and store them properly
- Follow the instructions on how to insert, remove and care for contact lenses



Improve your eye health during Eye Health Canada Month. Make an appointment today. To find an optometrist near you and for further information on eye health, visit www.opto.ca, or call 1-888-263-4676.

Does your child have vision problems?



Don't assume that a child who appears to see perfectly well is problem-free. Young children rarely complain – or are even aware – of vision problems, because they have no basis for comparing their vision with normal vision. The following signs could indicate that your child may need help:

- Suffers frequent headaches
- Squints or frowns when looking at close or distant items
- Rubs eyes or blinks frequently
- Avoids or becomes irritated with close work, such as looking at books
- Sits too close to the television, or holds objects very close to the face
- Loses his or her place while reading
- Omits or confuses small words when reading
- Uses a finger to maintain his or her place while reading
- Makes frequent reversals when reading or writing
- Turns or tilts head, or covers one eye, to view objects
- Red, itchy, crusty or watery eyes or eyelids, or one eye that turns in or out
- Difficulty with hand-eye co-ordinated activities, such as catching a ball
- Touches things to help recognize them



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