

important advice on how best to look after your eyes



The Gift of Sight



What better subject to include in Focus than some important advice on eyesight? One of life's precious gifts, it is all-too often taken for granted, especially by the younger members of society. Those of us in our senior years can also be complacent, accepting deteriorating vision simply as part of growing old. That may be so to a degree, but many of the inconveniences we have chosen to put up with can be treated, while some, if left unattended, may result in major complications, or permanent loss of sight. A visit to a qualified professional can prevent this happening.

Gary Cerie; B. Optom (Hons) NSW, FACBO, COVD, FAICD, GCBA is a respected practising Optometrist in Perth, Australia, and has kindly agreed to write this article, passing on some of his extensive knowledge and experience. He has been looking after us for years and has not only ensured that we are wearing the correct lenses in our spectacles, but has also offered invaluable suggestions on the best ways to prevent problems and keep our eyes healthy.

Here are a few of the questions he is frequently asked, plus his answers. Following these are some very important messages that all of us should seriously consider.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: How often should I be tested?

A: Every two years if there are no urgent, or new symptoms. More frequently if you wear contact lenses or have an eye or general health condition that requires monitoring (Diabetes; some people with high blood pressure; glaucoma; cataracts; macular degeneration).

Q: I can see great...Why do I need an eye test?

A: There are many sight- (and some life-) threatening diseases that are symptomless until it is too late to treat them. A regular eye examination should identify many of these conditions when they are treatable.

Q: When should I have my child's eyes tested?

A: 6 months, 2 years and 4-5 years of age as a routine, and before that if you suspect some problem. There are signs or symptoms (eg closing or covering an eye to see; head-turn or tilt; light sensitivity, pain or constant/regular headaches; avoiding tasks); or you have a family history of eye problems.

Q: What do you check for in an eye test?

A: Sight, binocular vision, colour vision, eye conditions (like strabismus, cataracts, glaucoma, macular degeneration, pterygia, dry eyes, retinal and vitreous degeneration/detachment, haemorrhages), plus eye signs of general conditions (like diabetes, high blood pressure, multiple sclerosis, cholesterol).

SIGNS, SYMPTOMS AND PROCEDURES:

Q: I'm seeing Spots...Should I worry?

A: If there is a sudden increase in spots and associated flashing, if they are in a constant position or increasing in size, make an appointment immediately. If they are small in number, not associated with other signs and they move out of your vision when you try to look at them, tell us at your next visit. When in doubt, come in.

Q: Why do I see flashing lights?

A: Can be associated with migraines or may be an indication of retinal or vitreous detachment and should be investigated. Make an appointment to be seen.

Q: What is Vision Training?

A: An individual programme of home and/or office exercises to improve a variety of visual anomalies. Sight, prescription, binocular co-ordination (squints and lazy eyes), visual perceptual delays (often evident in people with reading difficulties). Sports enhancement.

Q: What is Visual Perception?

A: The interpretation of what is seen rather than the clarity of sight. The organisation of what is seen into useful visual information. This is the precursor to the specific skills used in written language, for instance.

Q: What are cataracts?

A: Opacification of the lens inside your eye. Usually caused by age and UV exposure but may be caused by trauma, radiation, diet and medication. Cataracts cause blur and distortion of lights.

Q: What is Amblyopia?

A: Often referred to as a "lazy eye". When the sight is reduced below normal and cannot be corrected by the simple use of glasses, contact lenses or visual aids.

Q: What is Strabismus?

A: When one or both eyes turn in or out – either constantly or intermittently.

Q: Can you fix colour blindness?

A: No. Colour defects are inherited defects affecting the colour sensitive cones in the retina. It is important to know if you have a colour deficiency as it can influence what careers (studies) you may do and may affect driving safety.

WHAT ARE THE THINGS WE CAN DO TO PROTECT SIGHT AND VISION?

Even healthy eyes can be helped by maintaining good habits, especially from an early age:

Protect yourself from UV light. Whilst sunlight is generally good for us, the UV light can be damaging to the skin, the outside of the eye and also the lens and macula inside the eye.

You don't need sunglasses to protect your eyes from the UV; you need to:

- a) Wear a broad brimmed hat.
 - b) Wear: lenses that block the UV – this can be your clear prescription lenses or safety specs; sunglasses with little or no tint. This is particularly important when around sand and water or playing sports like tennis with reflective surfaces and where you are looking up and down.
- IF you are glare-sensitive then find the tint (sunglasses) that makes you feel comfortable.**

GENERAL HEALTH AND HOW YOU DO THINGS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- 1) Eat well. A healthy body means a healthy eye. Make sure you have a balanced diet not high in sugars, salts and fats. That doesn't mean none! Water rather than carbonated or sweet drinks is good. Green leafy vegetables are good.
- 2) Vary the tasks that you do often and MOVE. No longer than 40 minutes at the books, computers, electronic games without getting up and moving around. Less time should be spent doing concentrated near tasks by younger children. Another technique to reduce strain is close your eyes, or look up and away from the books or screen when you are thinking, before returning to type or read.
- 3) Have good lighting: higher light levels (natural daylight is best) make for better, more-relaxed focussing. Have the light close to your work and over your shoulder, rather than in front of you where it can be a glare source. Even young people who can work in lower lighting will get more tired, and this can create additional problems when concentrating in poorer light.
- 4) Have good posture - no closer to your work than where your arm forms a right angle. The distance between your knuckle when making a fist, placed under your chin, and your elbow is the right distance for everyone.
- 5) Have your eyes checked regularly - even if you think your sight is good. Many conditions can be free of symptoms until it is too late to fix!

We extend our thanks to Gary for what we hope will be timely advice, giving all of you the chance to see your future more clearly.

For further information visit: www.bullcreekoptomtrist.com.au

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