



# Vision Impairment

Approximately half a million Australians are blind or vision impaired. Approximately 80% of blindness and vision loss is caused by 5 conditions: age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma or refractive error. Regular eye tests can detect eye conditions early, helping to prevent deterioration in vision.

## How eyes work

The eye works like a camera. The cornea, iris, pupil and lens focus light onto the retina. The retina is sensitive to light and acts like the film in a camera. It captures images and sends them via the optic nerve to the brain, where the images are interpreted.

## Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Age-Related Macular Degeneration (AMD) most commonly develops after the age of 50. It damages a small area of the retina called the macula, which is responsible for central vision. Side vision is not significantly affected.

Symptoms of AMD include:

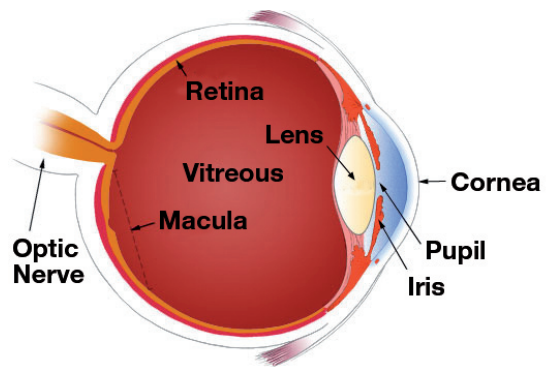
- Difficulty reading or doing any activity requiring fine vision
- Distortion - straight lines appear wavy or bent
- Difficulty distinguishing faces or things in the central field of vision
- Dark patches or empty spaces in the central field of vision.

AMD may affect one or both eyes and there are different types of AMD. Dry AMD causes gradual vision loss and Wet AMD causes sudden changes in vision.

Current treatment for AMD aims to slow down or stop deterioration of the macula and preserve remaining sight. It cannot improve sight. Certain vitamins and minerals that are important for eye health may help people with dry AMD. Laser therapy and medicines may help people with wet AMD.

## Cataract

A cataract is a clouding in the lens of the eye, which changes the way light passes through the lens. Cataracts usually develop slowly and may occur in one or both eyes.



Risk factors for cataracts include:

- Increasing age
- Family history of cataracts
- Certain medical conditions (e.g., diabetes)
- Certain medicines (e.g., corticosteroids)
- Smoking
- Alcohol consumption
- Prolonged exposure to sunlight.

Symptoms of cataract include:

- Cloudy, blurred or double vision
- Fading or yellowing of colours
- Glare. Headlights, lamps, or sunlight may appear too bright. A halo may appear around lights
- Poor night vision.

Initially, cataract may be managed with new spectacles, brighter lighting, anti-glare sunglasses and magnifying lenses. If these do not help, surgery is necessary to remove the cloudy lens and insert an artificial lens.

## Diabetic Retinopathy

Diabetes can damage the blood vessels that nourish the retina, leading to retinal damage. Every diabetic is at risk of developing diabetic retinopathy, but tight control of blood glucose levels can prevent or delay vision loss. Laser treatment can help minimize vision loss.

Adult-onset diabetics should have an eye test at diagnosis, then at least every two years and more often if retinopathy develops.

## Glaucoma

Glaucoma is a disorder that permanently damages the optic nerve. This damage is mostly caused by increased fluid pressure inside the eye. The most common form of glaucoma is open-angle glaucoma which destroys vision gradually.

Risk factors for glaucoma include:

- Increasing age
- Family history of glaucoma
- Certain medical conditions (e.g., diabetes, migraine, high blood pressure)
- Certain medicines (e.g., corticosteroids).

Symptoms of glaucoma include:

- Loss of side vision
- Blurred vision
- Coloured rings around lights
- Eye pain and severe headaches, if pressure rises suddenly.

Symptoms may not occur in the early stages and many people with glaucoma are unaware they have it. Regular eye tests are essential to detect glaucoma.

Treatment for glaucoma aims to slow down or stop the damage process and preserve remaining sight. It cannot improve sight. Treatment may include:

- Regular eye drops to reduce intra-ocular pressure
- Laser surgery
- Surgery.

## Important

AMD, cataract, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and refractive error can only be diagnosed by examining the eyes with special instruments. The earlier these disorders are detected, the greater the chance of preserving remaining eyesight. Eye tests are available from optometrists or by referral from your doctor or optometrist to an ophthalmologist.

Have regular eye tests if:

- you are over the age of 40 years
- you have a family history of eye disease
- you have diabetes
- you notice anything different about your vision.

Your **Self Care** Pharmacist

## Refractive Error

Refractive error describes the eyes' inability to focus images clearly on the retina. Refractive errors include:

- Astigmatism
- Hypermetropia (long-sightedness)
- Myopia (near-sightedness)
- Presbyopia (age-related changes)

Glasses, contact lenses and sometimes surgery can correct or improve refractive error.

## Self care

Speaking with your optometrists or ophthalmologist and maintaining a healthy lifestyle can help protect your eyesight.

- Have regular eye tests.
- Eat regular, healthy meals, including plenty of fruit, vegetables and grains. Limit foods high in fat, sugar or salt.
- Exercise at a moderate level for at least 30 minutes on all or most days of the week.
- Don't smoke.
- Limit alcohol consumption.
- Wear sunglasses to protect eyes from UV radiation.

## Related fact cards

- *Contact lens care*
- *Glaucoma (website only)*
- *Red and Dry eyes*
- *Type 1 Diabetes*
- *Type 2 Diabetes*
- *Weight and health*

## For more information

**Vision 2020 Australia** – phone 03 9656 2020 or website [www.vision2020australia.org.au](http://www.vision2020australia.org.au) – this website provides links to organizations involved with all aspects of eye health and vision care.

**Diabetes Australia** – phone 1300 136 588 or website [www.diabetesaustralia.com.au](http://www.diabetesaustralia.com.au)

**Eyes on Diabetes** website – [www.eyesondiabetes.org.au](http://www.eyesondiabetes.org.au)

**Glaucoma Australia** – phone 1800 500 880 or website [www.glaucoma.org.au](http://www.glaucoma.org.au)

**Macular Degeneration Foundation** – phone 1800 111 709 or website [www.mdfoundation.com.au](http://www.mdfoundation.com.au)

**Consumer Medicine Information (CMI)** leaflets – your pharmacist can advise on availability.

**NPS Medicines Line** – phone 1300 888 763 Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm EST.

**The Poisons Information Centre** – in case of poisoning phone 131 126 from anywhere in Australia.

**Pharmacy Self Care Support** – phone 1300 369 772 and ask for the Pharmacy Self Care Field Officer.

Pharmacists are medicines experts. Ask a pharmacist for advice when choosing a medicine.

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