



Most people know that smoking is not good for their health, but many are surprised to learn that smokers are more at risk of losing their vision.

Smoking can lead to vision loss and blindness which can severely impact a person's quality of life, affecting driving, reading and recognising faces.

How does smoking affect the eyes?

Cigarette smoke contains around 7,000 chemicals. When you breathe in, these chemicals enter the blood stream and damage blood vessels throughout the body, including your eyes.

Damage to the eye is often permanent. Stopping smoking is one of the easiest things you can do to protect your vision.

What are the eye problems that smoking can worsen or cause?

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD): damage to the macula at the back of the eye, leads to the loss of detailed central vision. It has no cure, but some treatments can slow down the progression of some types of AMD. Stopping smoking is the main way to reduce your risk. Smokers are up to three times as likely to develop AMD compared to those who don't. They are also more likely to lose vision from the condition earlier than non-smokers.

- Cataracts: the lens in the eye becomes cloudy leading to blurred vision. They often develop with age and are treated with surgery to replace the damaged lens. Smokers who smoke 20 or more cigarettes per day are twice as likely to develop cataracts compared with people who have never smoked.
- Diabetic retinopathy (DR): damage to the blood vessels at the back of the eye (retina) that may lead to vision loss and blindness. All people with diabetes are at risk of DR. Good management of diabetes, blood pressure and cholesterol can reduce the risk of DR. Regular eye tests are important to detect and treat DR before vision is affected. Smoking may worsen DR in people with type 1 diabetes. Smoking is also a risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes.
- Contact lenses: smokers who wear contact lenses are more likely to develop infections and swelling in the eye, compared to non-smokers. This can lead to scarring and possible vision loss over time.

Secondhand smoke can irritate the eyes of non-smokers leading to stinging, burning or prickling sensations, watery eyes and redness.

What can you do?

- Stop smoking, or better still do not start. While some of the effects of smoking are reversible, it can also cause permanent damage. The earlier you quit, the better for your eyes and your health.
- Have regular eye tests with an eye health professional (optometrist or ophthalmologist). This can help detect eye problems early to prevent vision loss.

For more information

- Speak to an eye health professional or GP.
- Visit www.visioninitiative.org.au

For information on how to stop smoking speak to your GP, contact the Quitline: 13 78 48 or visit: www.quit.org.au

Don't delay, save your sight – get tested and stop smoking.



A partnership promoting eye health and vision care



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