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GENERAL INFORMATION

# GENERAL EYE HEALTH



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# WHAT IS GENERAL OPHTHALMOLOGY?

**General (or comprehensive) ophthalmologists treat a wide variety of eye conditions and also perform cataract surgery. All Vision Eye Institute doctors have completed extensive specialist training in order to become a general ophthalmologist.**

In addition, many have undertaken further training and extra qualifications in specific diseases or conditions affecting the eye – this is called subspecialisation. In certain situations where more specialised care or surgery is required, a general ophthalmologist may refer you to a subspecialist.

## **Why should I have regular eye checks?**

Maintaining good eye health is important, but we often take our eyes for granted. A number of eye conditions have no obvious symptoms until the advanced stages. In fact, around 90% of all vision loss is actually preventable or treatable.<sup>1</sup>

From the age of 40, it is normal to experience changes in your vision. Your risk of developing certain eye conditions also starts to increase. Have regular eye tests with your optometrist to ensure any issues are detected and treated as early as possible.





## What happens during a comprehensive eye test?

Your ophthalmologist will take a detailed history, including family history of conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure or heart disease. You will be asked about any vision problems you are currently experiencing, as well as any that you have had previously. If you use prescription glasses or contact lenses, make sure you take these to your appointment.

The comprehensive eye examination includes tests to determine the health, function and appearance of different parts of the eye.

These may include:

**Visual acuity** test to check how well you can see from a set distance using a Snellen chart. This chart contains rows of letters, which decrease in size from the top line to the bottom line.

**Eye muscle test** to check the function of the muscles responsible for moving the eye. Your ophthalmologist will hold up and move a pen or object and ask you to follow it with your eyes without moving your neck.



**Refraction test** to determine if your vision is normal or if you need corrective lenses. Your ophthalmologist may use a digital refractor or retinoscope to direct a beam of light into your eye and assess how effectively it can focus light. If you have a refractive error, fine adjustments for prescription lenses are made by getting you to look through a phoropter. This mask-like device is used to identify which lenses give you the sharpest vision.

**Visual field test** to assess your peripheral (side) vision. You may be asked to look into a special instrument and press a button when you see a flashing light. Alternatively, you may be asked to keep your head still, cover one eye and report at what stage you see the ophthalmologist's moving hand.

**Colour vision test** using multi-coloured dot patterns. Being 'blind' to a certain colour (or colours) will prevent you seeing particular patterns.

**Slit-lamp examination** allows your ophthalmologist to examine the cornea, lens, iris and anterior chamber of the eye. You are asked to sit and rest your chin and forehead on a device that combines a microscope with a bright light. Fluorescent eye drops may be used to look for cuts, foreign objects or infections of the cornea.

**Retinal examination** to check for diseases of the retina and optic nerve at the back of your eye. After applying eye drops to dilate the pupil, your ophthalmologist uses an ophthalmoscope, slit lamp or bright light mounted on their head to examine each eye. These eye drops cause blurred vision and sensitivity to light for a few hours after the test, so you may not be able to drive home – you may wish to make other travel arrangements.



**Tonometry** to measure the internal eye pressure, using a device called a tonometer. Eye drops are often used to numb the eye first.

**Pachymetry** uses ultrasound waves to measure the thickness of the cornea and look for signs of increased intraocular pressure. Eye drops are used to numb the eye first.

**Neurological exam** to check the function of your cranial nerves. This may be required in some situations.



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**THE RESULTS OF MOST TESTS ARE AVAILABLE STRAIGHT AWAY, BUT SOME MAY TAKE A FEW DAYS.**

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# HOW WILL MY CONDITION BE TREATED?

If you have a refractive error where the shape of your eyeball prevents light focusing properly (resulting in blurred or distorted vision), your ophthalmologist will prescribe corrective glasses.

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## LASER EYE SURGERY MAY BE AN OPTION TO PERMANENTLY CORRECT YOUR REFRACTIVE ERROR.

If an eye disease is detected or suspected, you may need to have further diagnostic tests before a treatment plan can be recommended. In certain situations, a general ophthalmologist may also refer you to another ophthalmologist who has subspecialised in a particular part of the eye (e.g. a corneal or retinal specialist).

Maintaining good eye health is important throughout your life. In addition to having regular eye checks with an optometrist, you should follow tips to help keep your eyes healthy (see next page).





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# TIPS TO KEEP YOUR EYES HEALTHY

## WEAR PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR

To avoid eye accidents, wear high-quality protective eyewear (safety glasses and goggles, safety shields, eye guards) when playing sports or doing activities such as mowing the lawn, using hand tools or spray painting.

## QUIT SMOKING

Smoking greatly increases the risk of developing a retinal disease (e.g. age-related macular degeneration) and cataracts, worsens existing vision problems and can cause optic nerve damage, leading to blindness.

## PROTECT YOUR EYES FROM UV RAYS

Wear good-quality sunglasses that block out 99–100% of both UVA and UVB radiation and a wide-brimmed hat to avoid sun damage to your eyes. The sun can cause cataracts, eye cancers, photokeratitis (eye sunburn) and pterygia (Surfer's Eye).

## AVOID FLASH BURNS

Flash burns of the eye are like sunburn and can cause a painful inflammation of the cornea. Exposure to a welder's torch, reflection off water or snow, or looking directly at extremely powerful lights, such as a photographer's halogen flood lamp, can cause a flash burn on your eyes. Protective eyewear should always be worn in any of these situations.

## TAKE BREAKS FROM THE COMPUTER

Spending a lot of time at the computer or focusing intently on something is linked to eye fatigue and a decrease in blinking. Try the 20-20-20 rule – every 20 minutes, look 20 feet (roughly 6 metres) away for 20 seconds. This can help reduce eye strain and encourage blinking.

## USE CONTACT LENSES AS DIRECTED

Incorrect use of contact lenses can be bad for your eyes. Make sure you follow the hygiene and handling requirements of lenses and cleaning solution as directed, and visit your eye care specialist if you are having trouble with your eyes.

## DON'T RUB YOUR EYES

Excess rubbing of your eyes can increase eye pressure and/or damage the cornea, potentially causing keratoconus, a degenerative disease that leads to significant visual distortion.

## THROW AWAY OLD MAKEUP

Replace cosmetic eye products every three months and regularly wash makeup brushes thoroughly with hot water and soap to avoid transferring bacteria to your eyes. Be especially careful if you wear contact lenses and do not share eye makeup with others.







## EAT YOUR WAY TO HEALTHY EYES

To maintain good eye health, eat a healthy, balanced diet containing fish high in omega-3s (e.g. salmon), leafy greens, brightly coloured fruits and vegetables, and nuts and seeds.

## MAINTAIN A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Extra weight is known to increase blood pressure which can put stress on the delicate blood vessels in your eyes. Damage to these blood vessels can cause vision problems. Being overweight or obese also increases your risk of developing diabetes and other medical conditions, which can lead to eye conditions such as diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma.

## KNOW YOUR FAMILY'S MEDICAL HISTORY

Many eye diseases and conditions are hereditary – that is, the increased risk of developing the condition is inherited in your genes. If someone in your family has been diagnosed with an eye disease, you may be at higher risk of developing it yourself. It's important to make sure all of your healthcare providers know your family's medical history. This is particularly true if a family member has been diagnosed with an eye condition.



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# FAQs

## What does an ophthalmologist do?

Ophthalmologists are also known as eye specialists, eye surgeons and eye doctors. Ophthalmologists can diagnose and treat eye conditions, perform eye surgery, and prescribe medications and glasses.

A GP or optometrist must refer you to see an ophthalmologist.

## What does an optometrist do?

Optometrists can prescribe glasses and contact lenses and, in some cases, a limited range of medications. They can diagnose and monitor eye disease and also provide referrals directly to ophthalmologists.

Eye examinations by an optometrist attract a Medicare rebate and are often bulk-billed.

## What does an orthoptist do?

Orthoptists can prescribe glasses and contact lenses. They work with ophthalmologists in hospitals and private practice, in research and in low-vision agencies to provide education and home support.



## What does an optical dispenser do?

Optical dispensers make and dispense glasses and contact lenses, based on prescriptions written by ophthalmologists, optometrists and orthoptists.

## How often should I have my eyes checked?

You should generally have your eyes checked at least once every 2 years by an optometrist (and/or ophthalmologist in certain situations). A routine eye check may lead to the early diagnosis and treatment of a condition – hopefully, before any irreversible vision loss has occurred.

People who wear contact lenses, have health conditions (e.g. diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis) or have a family history of eye disorders may require more frequent eye checks.

## What should I eat to maintain good eye health?

Eat foods such as oily fish (omega-3 oils), leafy greens (lutein and zeaxanthin), brightly coloured vegetables and fruits (vitamins C and A), and nuts and seeds (vitamin E). You can decrease your chance of developing vision-threatening diseases, such as macular degeneration, by eating these foods as part of a healthy diet.

### REFERENCES

1. Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Eye health. Available at: <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/eye-health> (Accessed 16 September 2022)



# COMPREHENSIVE EYE CARE



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Vision Eye Institute is the largest private provider of ophthalmic services in Australia. Our team of highly regarded doctors includes general ophthalmologists as well as those who specialise in specific areas/conditions of the eye.

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PTERYGIUM		CORNEAL TRANSPLANTATION	
CORNEAL CONDITIONS		NERVE-RELATED VISION PROBLEMS	
RECONSTRUCTIVE EYE SURGERY		CHILDREN'S EYE HEALTH	
GENERAL EYE HEALTH			

## OUR GENERAL EYE CLINICS

For more information or to find a Vision Eye Institute clinic that treats general eye conditions, visit:

[visioneyeinstitute.com.au/services/general-eye-health](http://visioneyeinstitute.com.au/services/general-eye-health)

This information is general in nature. All medical and surgical procedures have potential benefits and risks. Consult your ophthalmologist for specific medical advice.



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