



# Vision care Info-sheet for seniors

**A**s we get older it is normal that our vision changes. Our eyes may find it harder to read small print, take longer to adjust from light to dark and be more sensitive to glare from sunlight or unshielded light bulbs. There's a decline in depth perception that can make it hard to judge distances, and perceiving contrasts and colours may become more difficult.

Sight provides much pleasure, but it's also an important part of staying safe and independent. Because our eyes do so much for us, they deserve good care and attention.

## Be kind to your eyes!

**Turn on the lights.** Seeing better can sometimes be as easy as changing a light bulb! Putting 100 or 150-watt bulbs in your lamps can reduce eye strain (but make sure your fixture is designed for that wattage!). Brighter lighting in stairways can help prevent falls.

**Don't smoke.** Studies show that tobacco smoking is an important risk factor in the early onset of an eye disease called age-related macular degeneration (AMD). This disease

causes serious and permanent loss of central vision.

**Reduce glare.** There are many ways of reducing glare, including good lampshades, glare shields on computer monitors, and sunglasses. Wear sunglasses that provide 99 to 100% UV-A and UV-B protection when you go outside during the day. They will protect you from UV rays that can harm your eyes even on a cloudy day.

**Protect yourself.** Many people suffer vision loss because of accidents in the home. Here are some ways to prevent damage to your eyes:

- put a grease shield over frying foods
- make sure that spray cans and bottle nozzles are pointed away from you
- wear safety glasses in the workshop and when opening and using chemical products like ammonia
- when using bungee cords, be careful of recoil

**Eat your carrots.** Studies show that a daily dose of the vitamins and minerals found in melons, citrus, carrots, spinach and kale may help slow the progress of age-related eye diseases such as macular degeneration, glaucoma or cataracts.



**Get an eye examination.** Many changes to vision happen so slowly that you may not realize you have a problem. If you are over 45 years of age, the most important thing you can do to protect your vision is to have an eye exam on a regular basis. Finding problems early may make the difference between maintaining good vision and vision loss.

## Vision changes

Here are the most common changes that come with age:

**Presbyopia** is the inability to focus on close objects or small print. Reading glasses usually solve the problem. The usual age of onset is 40.

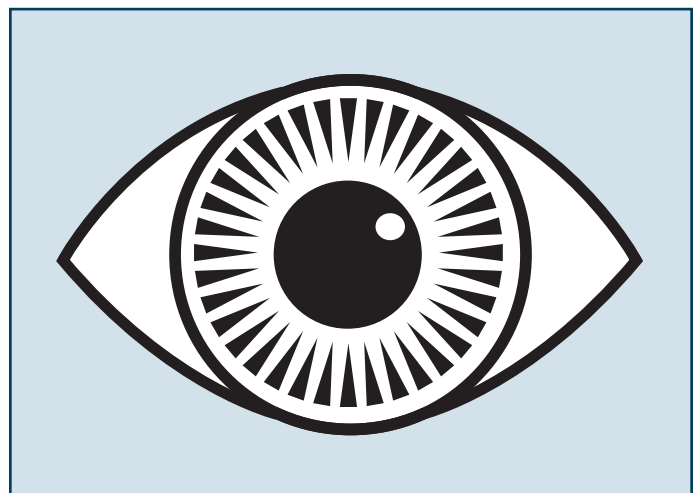
**Cataracts** are a gradual clouding of the natural lens of the eye that prevents light from reaching the retina. If the central part of the lens is cloudy, you may not be able to read or drive unless the cataract is removed. This is one of the most successful surgeries done in medicine today.

**Floaters** are tiny spots or specks that float across the field of vision, that are often normal. If a floater appears right in your line of vision, sometimes moving your eye around will make it shift out of your central vision. If you notice a sudden change in the number or types

of spots you see, or if they come with light flashes, see your eye doctor as soon as you can. These may be signs of a serious problem.

**Dry eyes** are a common problem, especially with aging. Your eyes may feel gritty, itchy or burning. Your doctor may suggest using a humidifier in your home, or special eye drops that act as tears. In a few serious cases, surgery may be needed to correct the problem.

**Tearing** (watery eyes) is another common problem. It may be because you are more sensitive to light, wind or changes in temperature. Simply protecting your eyes by shielding them or wearing sunglasses may solve the problem. The condition can also be a result of an eye infection, eye irritation or blocked tear duct, all of which can be appropriately treated. See your doctor to find the exact cause and treatment.





**Visit your eye doctor (ophthalmologist) if you or someone else notices that you:**

- squint – you may have a greater sensitivity to light and glare
- choose bright over dull coloured objects or clothing
- spill food or drinks because you misjudge where objects really are
- find it hard to copy from written texts
- are getting “clumsy” – you have a hard time threading a needle, buttoning a shirt or finding food on your plate
- see flashes of light or rapid movement from the corner of your eyes
- experience difficulties with sharpness and contrast while driving at night
- experience uncontrolled eye movement
- make driving mistakes – you miss street or traffic signs. This is important for your safety and the safety of others. Older drivers with vision impairment are more likely to be involved in a car accident
- have fallen because of a missed step or an object on the floor that you didn't see

## Vision loss

Here are the most common reasons for age-related vision loss:

**Glaucoma** is an eye problem that develops when the pressure within the eye starts destroying the nerve fibres within the retina. If not treated early, glaucoma can cause vision loss and blindness. Because most people have no early symptoms, it is very important to have regular eye exams. Treatment may include eye drops, medication or surgery.

**Age-related macular degeneration** is an eye disease that occurs when the macula (the central part of the retina responsible for sharp vision) is damaged. This damage can be the result of many factors, including aging, and causes permanent loss of central vision. Regular eye exams can detect the disease early on and laser treatments can slow down central vision loss.

**Diabetic retinopathy** is an eye problem linked to diabetes. Changes to blood vessels can cause the retina to become oxygen starved. Symptoms include cloudy vision and seeing spots. This condition goes through many stages and can result in blindness. If you have diabetes, have regular examinations and inform your eye specialist that you are diabetic. Treatment can slow down vision loss. Laser treatment in the early stages often proves successful.



*For most seniors, normal age-related vision loss can be corrected or stopped with glasses, medication or surgery.*

*For others, using vision aids and making changes to their homes and routines help them stay safe and independent.*

*For those who have more serious vision loss, there are many services available to help you through this difficult period of adjustment.*

## For more information...

If you want to have your eyes checked or treated, look under **Optometrists** in the Yellow Pages or ask your family physician if a referral to an **ophthalmologist** is suitable.

To learn more about eye problems, falls prevention, vision and driving, or on how to live an active life with vision loss, call the following organizations or visit their web sites:

## Eye conditions and vision loss

**Canadian Ophthalmological Society**  
[www.eyesite.ca](http://www.eyesite.ca)

**Canadian National Institute for the Blind**  
(416) 486-2500; [www.cnib.ca](http://www.cnib.ca)

**Canadian Association of Optometrists**  
[www.opto.ca](http://www.opto.ca)

## Falls prevention

**Public Health Agency of Canada**  
Division of Aging and Seniors  
(613) 952-7606  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines)

This web site offers publications on home safety, assistive devices, falls prevention, etc.

## Driving

Contact your **provincial or territorial ministry of transportation**, who can provide tips and advice to improve driving safety. The following Ontario web site provides excellent information:  
[www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/pubs/yourdriving.htm](http://www.mto.gov.on.ca/english/pubs/yourdriving.htm)

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*Division of Aging and Seniors  
Public Health Agency of Canada  
[www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/seniors-aines)*

*This info-sheet is available in alternative formats on demand.*

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