

Elderly can reduce risk of falling

As we age, having regular eye examinations becomes more important because the older we get, the more vision impairment can reduce the quality of life and increase the risk of falls.

Falls are a serious health issue and after someone has experienced a fall, their confidence, mobility and independence can be affected.

Poor vision is common in elderly people. The causes are varied and include problems such as not wearing spectacles, an incorrect or out of date prescription, scratched lenses, inability to afford them and inappropriate lenses.

Cataracts, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy are vision related problems associated with ageing. These problems are often treatable or preventable.

Having eye examinations and updating spectacle prescriptions regularly is the best option for managing your vision and your environment.

While many elderly people benefit from a change in their spectacles' prescription, major changes in a prescription can cause some initial problems.

If you wear bifocals or multifocals for the first time, blurring of the lower visual field or side vision can make judging the

position of steps and other hazards more difficult.

Talk to your optometrist about adapting to wearing your new spectacles.

Preventing and treating vision problems as early as possible provides the best chance for the elderly to maintain independence.



Y O U R O P T O M E T R I S T

We do much more

Optometrists do much more than measure your vision and prescribe spectacles and contact lenses.

They deal with a range of challenging visual problems including eye co-ordination and colour vision defects.

They also check the health of the eyes; deal with minor eye injuries; and detect, diagnose and manage eye diseases and conditions such as glaucoma, macular degeneration and cataracts.

Many optometrists treat eye conditions by prescribing therapeutic medicines, and some specialise in work with the elderly, children or people with low vision who need specialised spectacles and magnifiers. Optometrists may also perform foreign body removal.

Optometrists can provide services in locations such as aged care facilities and schools.

Sometimes optometrists are asked to visit workplaces to assess the work environment and suggest ways to protect workers' eyes from strain or injury.

If your optometrist detects signs of systemic disease such as diabetes or high blood pressure, they may refer you to another health professional such as a general medical practitioner or an eye surgeon.

DON'T FRY YOUR EYES



Minimise UV exposure

Sunglasses are as necessary for protecting our eyes from harmful UV rays as sunscreen is for protecting our skin.

The same harmful rays that damage skin can also increase the risk of developing eye problems such as cataracts, macular degeneration (a leading cause of blindness), cancer and pterygium (a fleshy growth on the cornea).

Everyone is at risk of eye damage from the sun year-round. The risk is greatest between 10 am and 4 pm. People who spend long hours outdoors without adequate eye protection are at greater risk. When sunlight reflects off snow, roads, sand or water, it further increases UV exposure.

The key to protection from harmful UV rays is to make it part of your routine and to limit your exposure.

Wearing a broad-brimmed hat reduces the amount of UV reaching your eyes. Wrap-around sunglasses are great at protecting your eyes from the side. Photochromic lenses that automatically adjust to light or dark conditions provide convenient UV and glare protection for prescription wearers.

Sunglasses do not need to be expensive. As long as they fit well and meet Australian standards, your eyes will be protected. Look for a label that specifically states 99 to 100 per cent UV protection, EPF 10 or UV 400.

Your optometrist can give you the best advice about suitable UV protection that best suits your lifestyle.

Have your eyes tested regularly as the earlier UV-related conditions are detected, the better the chance of treatment.

Children's vision is vital for

Vision plays a vital role in a child's development and progress at school. If the visual system does not function properly, learning can suffer.

Children need good vision to co-ordinate eye movements, maintain clear focus as they read, and make quick focusing changes when looking up to the board and back to their desks. They must also be able to interpret and accurately process what they are seeing.

The most common problems with children's vision are those affecting the ability to see clearly and sharply. Myopia (shortsightedness or blurred distance vision), hyperopia (longsightedness or difficulty focusing at near) and astigmatism (distortion of vision) are the three most prevalent vision conditions among children. Once diagnosed, they are usually easy to correct.

Children with lazy eyes (amblyopia) and crossed or wandering eyes (strabismus) face a different set of problems. They have little depth perception, and balance and co-ordination can suffer because their eyes do not work well together.

Children with obviously crossed or wandering eyes have to deal with self-consciousness arising from questions, stares and teasing from other children. If any of these problems exists or other vision skills are lacking, your child will have to work harder at school. This can lead to headaches, fatigue and other eyestrain problems.

As a parent, be alert for symptoms that may indicate your child has a vision or visual processing problem.

Observe your child's behaviour and note whether anything



appears strange about their eyes.

Most importantly, have your child's eyes checked by an optometrist as early detection can save years of struggling.

Blepharitis can stick around

Blepharitis is a common condition that causes inflammation of the eyelids. It usually affects both eyes on the edge of the eyelids and although rarely serious, it can be an annoying and recurring problem.

Dry, sore or red eyes are common symptoms and sometimes burning, itching or the feeling that something is in your eye can be experienced. You may also have an oily discharge or scaly, thickened skin around your eyelids.

Blepharitis can be associated with a skin condition such as acne rosacea (oil

gland malfunction) or a bacterial infection (staphylococcus).

Your optometrist can determine if you have blepharitis by examining your eyes with a special microscope called a slitlamp.



Photo Brian Tompkins

The particular type and cause of your blepharitis will determine the right treatment plan and care regime for you.

Treatment can include applying daily warm compresses (a clean, warmed washcloth) to soften the oily, sticky or crusty substances on the eyelids. Cleansing is an essential part of treatment. Your optometrist will recommend the solution to use such as salt water, warm water only, diluted baby shampoo or special over-the-counter lid cleansing products.

Lubricating eye drops and vitamin supplements may also be recommended

to promote ongoing eye health and comfort.

Blepharitis can be very contagious so care needs to be taken to stop the infection from spreading to your other eye and to other people. Always wash your hands before touching your eyelids. Wash your hair and face daily, wash your eyelids nightly and avoid cosmetics.

Blepharitis is commonly a long-term condition requiring ongoing treatment, but usually a simple care regime is all that is required to prevent or reduce the severity of future bouts.

PBS helps you

Some prescriptions written by optometrists for medicines dispensed by pharmacists are now available under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). This means your prescription may be subsidised by the Australian Government.

Optometrists' pharmaceutical prescriptions have been included in the PBS since 1 January 2008, improving all Australians' access to eye care.

Choosing the right frame

While fashion is important when choosing the right frame to suit your personality, there are other practical matters to consider.

One of the most important is the fit of the frame. Make sure that the frame sits comfortably on the bridge of your nose. To prevent the arms of your spectacles from

digging uncomfortably into the sides of your head, select a pair of frames that is wide enough for you. Your optometrist may be able to adjust the frame slightly but if major adjustments are required, then the frame probably is not right for you.

The frame must be appropriate for your prescription and for the type of lenses they are going to hold. A fine, delicate frame

is not suitable for high prescriptions as it will have difficulty supporting thicker lenses and the thick edges of the lenses may show.

The frame should not rest on your cheeks. Try smiling while you are trying on the frame—if it rides up, then it is sitting on your cheeks, not on your nose.

To help determine if you have selected the proper size, look at your feet and gently shake your head while wearing the frames. A well-fitting pair of spectacles will stay in place.

The quality of the frame can determine the cost. A good quality frame will last for years so look for sturdy construction and a high quality finish.

Nosepads should be well mounted and not rattle. Spring-loaded hinges allow the frame to flex a little when it is being put on and taken off and help maintain the fitting adjustment.

Seek professional advice to make sure you get the right frame that suits you and fits well.



LENSES DESIGNED FOR YOU

New generation progressive lenses use the latest technology to provide the best possible lenses designed just for you. This technology means that the lenses are tailor-made to your exact specifications so you get the best possible visual performance from your spectacles.

A progressive lens lets you look ahead to see in the distance, drop your gaze slightly to view your computer or read and do fine work without obvious changes in focus.

Vision is often said to be our most precious sense. Many people who wear high-technology progressive lenses for the first time are amazed by the improved visual clarity they provide.

They may wear their spectacles for all their waking hours and see the cost of the lenses as an essential investment in quality of life.

Developments in technology mean lens manufacturers are no longer tied to the constraints of traditional mass production. Local lens laboratories are able to design and produce progressive lenses for an individual, taking into account not only the prescription but also the position of the wearer's eyes in relation to the spectacle frame.

Your optometrist takes very specific measurements, a computer generates an individual design according to the data supplied, and lens grinding equipment shapes a pair of lenses that can provide you with optimal vision.