

Eye disorders - some common problems

Your eyes can become tired, blurred, sore or dry. Sometimes you might even see spots or get headaches. These complaints are very common and can often fix themselves. If they persist, it is best to see an optometrist for advice.

Concentrated tasks can cause tired eyes and blurred vision

If you spend a long time using a computer or watching television, your eyes can become tired and your vision blurred.

Using a computer does not cause permanent damage to your eyes. However working on a computer is a demanding visual task that can cause eye discomfort. If you have an uncorrected vision problem, this can make computer use uncomfortable and can lead to blurred vision and eye strain.

Whenever you concentrate on a computer screen or watch television, you tend to blink less which can lead to your eyes drying out. This is made worse if you are in a dry environment, such as a heated or air conditioned office.

Prevention of eye strain

You can help prevent dry eyes and minimise the risk of tired or sore eyes while reading or using a computer. Tips include:

- Take regular breaks
- Look around at objects that are at different distances
- Try to blink often.

If this doesn't help, consult an optometrist to determine the underlying cause of the problem. Treatment may include drops, exercises or glasses.

Blurry eyes at night

There are a number of reasons why your eyes may go blurry at night. For example:

- You are tired and your visual system is fatigued.
- You have a refractive error such as long sightedness or astigmatism. During the day you may be able to compensate for these, but when your eyes are tired your vision can go blurry.
- You could be mildly short-sighted. This may not bother you in normal light but you notice it at lower light levels.
- The tears on the front of your eyes may be drying out if you have been around heaters and air conditioners all day. This may cause your eyes to go a little blurry, but should clear when you blink.

If your vision has started going blurry, you should have your eyes examined to identify the problem.

Twitching eyes

Blepharospasm is an involuntary twitching of the muscles in your eyelid that is usually caused by stress or fatigue. This is a common condition that tends to recur every so often, usually in the same eye and the same area of the eyelid. The twitching may feel obvious to you; however if you get someone else to look, they usually won't notice any movement.

A good night's sleep is the easiest way to correct the problem. If it continues, see your optometrist.

Headaches

Headaches are generally a sign that something is wrong; however, there are many possible causes of headaches. Some of these are visually related such as uncorrected refractive error or focusing problems.

Valuable information can be gained from the nature of the headaches. For instance:

- When do the headaches arrive?
- How bad they are?
- Where they are? For example, in the forehead area or around the sides of the head.
- What triggers seem to start them?

Having an eye test is a good starting point when trying to narrow down the reason for headaches. If examination of your eyes is normal, see your doctor or other health care providers for further investigation.

Eye floaters

Floaters are specks that you sometimes see before your eyes. They are very common and are created when a tiny clump or strand forms within the clear jelly substance inside your eye (the vitreous). When you move your eyes to look at the floater, it moves because it is sitting within this vitreous.

Most people have some floaters and they are usually irritating but quite harmless. They may stay indefinitely or spontaneously disappear.

There is no treatment for floaters. However, if you suddenly notice a lot of floaters or flashing lights, you should have an eye examination to ensure that the internal surfaces of your eye are correctly positioned and healthy.

Watery eyes

Watery eyes can be due to:

- A low-grade infection of the eyelids, causing irritation on waking and subsequent tear production.
- Dry eyes, caused by many factors such as medications, general health conditions, environmental factors such as air conditioning or wind or rarely, incomplete closure of the eyelids. Dryness stimulates tear production.
- A problem with the drainage of tears out of the eye (sometimes caused by a blockage).
- A mild allergic reaction.
- Foreign material in the eye.

It is worth having your eyes examined to determine whether you need eye drops to lubricate the eyes or other treatment to correct an underlying condition.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local optometrist
- Optometrists Association Victoria Tel. (03) 9652 9100

Things to remember

- Common eye complaints include sore and tired eyes, blurred vision, headaches, twitching eyelids, watery or dry eyes.
- Most of these conditions can remedy themselves.
- If you have any problems that seem to be recurring or getting worse, see an optometrist.

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