

# Causes & Symptoms of Common Eye Problems

## Do you suffer from eye pain, excessive tearing, redness in your eyes, or have problems with your vision?

Knowing your symptoms is important as it can help you and your eye doctor find out if there is a problem. An eye examination can determine what is wrong so that your doctor can recommend the best treatment option for you.

Here are some common eye symptoms and their possible causes.

## Is your vision blurry or distorted?

Long-term blurry or distorted vision can be due to a number of causes.

Most commonly, blurry vision, in particular the inability to clearly see objects that are either far away or up close, is a sign of a simple refractive error like short-sightedness (myopia), long-sightedness (hyperopia), astigmatism or presbyopia (*lao hua*). These conditions can be readily managed with vision correction aids such as spectacles, contact lenses or refractive surgery such as LASIK.

Progressive clouding of vision, when you see objects through a mist, can be a sign of cataracts. This condition, which commonly affects the elderly, is due to the

thickening and clouding of the lens within the eye. It is reversible with surgery.

Poor vision can also be caused by medical conditions such as diabetes mellitus, stroke and hypertension. Certain medications such as chloroquine, or hydroxychloroquine for rheumatoid arthritis or other soft tissue diseases may also cause vision blurring.

A more serious cause of blurry or distorted vision is age-related macular degeneration, which often affects the central vision. In age-related macular degeneration, objects in the centre of the field of view are distorted but the peripheral vision remains clear. This condition is often irreversible and can cause blindness if left untreated, so early diagnosis is important.

If you are suffering from cloudy vision, do see your eye doctor for early diagnosis and treatment.

## Are you losing your peripheral vision?

If you are bumping into things or people beside you, or have difficulty seeing overtaking vehicles while

driving, you may be losing your peripheral or 'side' vision.

A common cause of loss of peripheral or 'side' vision is glaucoma, a condition where the eye pressure is usually too high for the eye. Glaucoma may cause an insidious loss of side vision, resulting in late diagnosis and advanced visual loss. Therefore, screening for glaucoma is advisable, especially for those who have a family history of glaucoma, or who are on steroid medications.

### Are your eyes itchy or watery?

If you are suffering from prolonged itchiness and watering of the eyes, you could have an allergy to pollen, pet hair, or other allergenic substances in your environment. The condition can be uncomfortable, but does not usually result in significant vision loss even though your eye may feel irritated and tired.

Dry eyes can also be another cause of itching and tearing. Your eye doctor can determine the cause of your eye discomfort and advise treatment.

### Do you suffer from eye pain?

Sharp pain in the eye may be caused by foreign bodies, cornea abrasion (break in the surface of the cornea) or even severe dry eye. Severe, dull pain, however, may indicate an acute attack of glaucoma; this is usually associated with vision loss and eye redness. Consult your doctor for an early diagnosis.

### Do you see floaters in your field of vision?

Floaters are dark, distinct spots that you may see in your field of vision. Floaters occur when the vitreous (the jelly-like content inside the eye) degenerates due to ageing or myopia. These vitreous debris cast shadows onto the field of vision that are seen as floaters.

Floaters can be an indication of vitreous degeneration, or a more serious problem like diabetic retinopathy, a condition that causes blood vessels in the retina to weaken and burst. The resulting blood that seeps into the eye forms floaters.

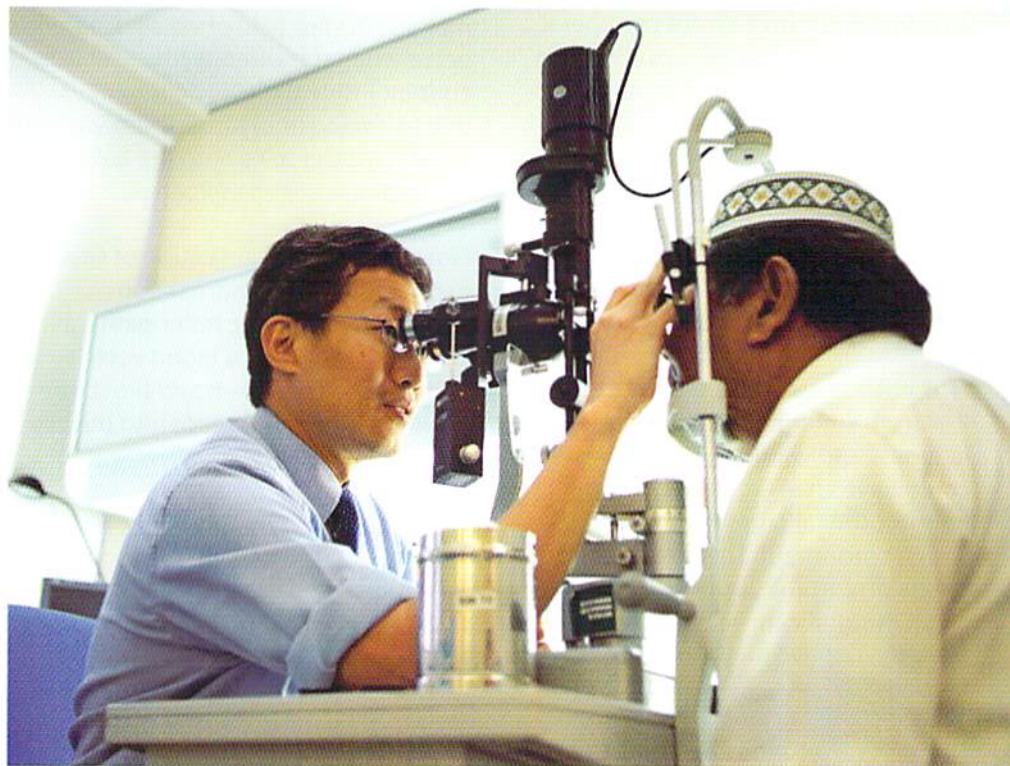
Floaters can also be caused by retinal tears or detachment, a serious condition when the retina of the eye detaches from the rest of the layers of the eye.

If you see floaters, see your eye doctor for early diagnosis and treatment.

### Are you seeing flashes?

Flashes appear as arcs of light across the field of vision. Sometimes it may occur as flashes of light. Like floaters, flashes are eye symptoms that are commonly associated with vitreous detachment or more seriously, with retinal detachment. If you see flashes, see your eye doctor for early diagnosis and treatment.

# Regular Eye Examination



An eye check is important for all – from the young to elderly.

## Protect your eyes with regular eye exams

Eyesight is one of the most important senses we have. It is a complex and intricate process of gathering, focusing and translating light into images. As we get older, the eye becomes more susceptible to damage and disease. Being alert to changes in vision is important in picking up eye diseases.

Some eye diseases such as high eye pressure leading to glaucoma have no symptoms in their early stages, so you may not know you have a problem until the disease is in its later stage. This can make treatment more difficult and the problem harder to reverse. Therefore, regular eye exams are essential for early diagnosis and treatment of any problem. Early detection and treatment

can slow down or even reverse the progression of eye disease.

## What happens during an eye examination?

An eye examination does not hurt. Your eye doctor will usually conduct a basic eye examination that will consist of an external check of your eyes, the eyelids and the surrounding areas. Parts of the eye, such as the conjunctiva, sclera, cornea and iris, will also be inspected for signs of disease.



A complete eye examination includes :

- Testing of vision (with or without corrective eyewear)
- Assessing the reflexes of your pupils
- Checking of eye muscle function
- Peripheral (side) vision testing
- Examining the front of the eye using an upright microscope (a slit lamp)
- Eye pressure tests
- Examining the back of the eye

## How often should one go for an eye exam?

### Babies (Age 3 and below)

Ensure that your child's eyes are screened during regular paediatric appointments. Some common childhood eye conditions to look out

for include strabismus (crossed eyes) and amblyopia (lazy eye). Screening is also performed to exclude rarer diseases such as congenital cataract and retinoblastoma (eye tumour).

### Children and Teenagers (Age 3 to 19)

Ensure that your child has a thorough eye check every one to two years during routine health check-ups or when getting fitted for corrective eyewear, such as for myopia.

### Young Adults (Age 20 to 39)

Have a comprehensive eye examination if you have a family history of eye disease or if you are suffering from an eye injury.

### Adults and Seniors (Age 40 to 64)

As you get older, age-related eye conditions are more likely to occur. To monitor vision changes, you should get a baseline eye disease screening when you are 40 and ask the doctor to assess how often you need to return for follow-up screenings.

### For Anyone with Risk Factors

If you have a risk factor for eye disease (are diabetic, have high blood pressure, have a family history of eye disease, or are taking prescription medications which may affect the eyes) you should see your ophthalmologist more frequently. Ask your eye doctor for the ideal interval between check-ups.