

No.1/September 2012

VISION & EYE HEALTH

3
TIPS
TO MAINTAIN
GOOD EYE HEALTH



**ARE YOU
AT RISK OF
MACULAR
DEGENERATION?**

I know I am.
Ita Buttrose.

PHOTO: ROSS COFFEY

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CHALLENGES

How does the future look for eye health in Australia? With eye disease on the rise as our population ages rapidly, **it is time for us to get smart about our eye health.** By simply visiting your optometrist and getting regular eye health examinations, you can increase the chance of having a clearer future.

Preventative eye health makes good sense

Almost 575,000 Australians over 40 are blind or vision impaired and this figure is set to increase in the next eight years to 800,000 as Australia's population ages, unless we are proactive about looking after our eyes.

The consequences of blindness and vision impairment are far reaching.

People who are blind or vision impaired have twice the risk of sustaining a fall, three times increased risk of suffering from depression, their risk of hip fractures can in-

crease to as much as eight times, admission to a nursing home can occur three years earlier and they are twice as likely to use health services.

There is also an economic cost associated with vision impairment and blindness. In 2009, the annual cost in Australia was estimated to be \$16.6 billion.

The good news is that 75 per cent of blindness and vision loss is preventable or treatable and there are a number of things we can do to prevent it or slow down its progression including:

- having regular eye tests
- visiting an eye care professional

"In 2009, the annual cost in Australia was estimated to be \$16.6 billion."



Jennifer Gersbeck
CEO, Vision
2020 Australia
PHOTO:
VISION2020
AUSTRALIA

immediately if there are any changes to eyesight

- quitting smoking to reduce the risk of cataracts and age-related macular degeneration
- wearing a hat and UV absorbing sunglasses
- maintaining a healthy weight
- wearing protective goggles and glasses at work or home, and
- keeping blood sugar, blood cholesterol levels under control.

Early prevention makes sense because it saves sight, saves money and increases the chance of healthy ageing.

JENNIFER GERSBECK
editorial@mediaplanet.com

Looking into private health funds

It is estimated that 1.2 million Australians put off seeing vision and eye health specialists despite concerns about their eyesight. And the reason cited for not taking action? It seems that most are worried about the cost.

What Medicare will and won't cover

Many people are unaware that Medicare fully covers the cost of a comprehensive eye examination performed by an optometrist once every two years. For eligible people, Medicare may also provide rebates

for other eye health services, including consultations relating to the prescribing of glasses or contact lenses.

What Medicare generally won't cover, however, is the cost of glasses, contact lenses or vision therapy, and this is where private health funds step in.

How private health care fits in

Depending on your level of cover, private health funds may pay for frames, prescription lenses, contact lenses and certain lens coverings. They may also cover cataract and eye lens procedures, laser eye

surgery and physical therapy for the eyes. And with many health care providers offering on-the-spot HICAPS (Health Industry Claims and Payments Services), patients can receive immediate payment from their health fund without queuing or form filling.

But aside from extra services not covered by Medicare, there are many other benefits for health fund members - ones that may be particularly beneficial for people with existing vision problems or a familial history of vision impairment. Private health fund members experience shorter waiting times for elective surgery, can choose to be

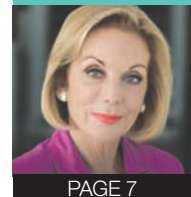
treated by their own doctor, and have greater control over when and where they are treated. And with the government providing a rebate of up to 40 per cent on health insurance premiums, comprehensive quality care is more accessible than ever.

So it seems that 1.2 million Australians no longer have an excuse. With the Medicare system and a wide range of private health fund options available, everybody can afford quality eye care.

SARAH MCKENZIE
editorial@mediaplanet.com



WE RECOMMEND



Ita Buttrose,
celebrity patron
for Macular
Degeneration
Foundation,
about keeping
your eyes healthy.
PHOTO: MD
FOUNDATION

PAGE 7

"My father had Macular Degeneration and I saw the impact this had on him in later life. There are preventive measures to help reduce the risk of developing this disease."

Refreshing outlook p. 8

Although Dry Eyes have become extremely common and sometimes debilitating for many Australians, there are many treatments now available to give comfort.

Made in the shade p. 5

With summer on its way, it's important to remember to protect your precious eyes.

MEDIA PLANET

VISION & EYE HEALTH
FIRST EDITION, SEPTEMBER 2012

Responsible for this issue:

Publisher: Elana McIntyre
elana.mcintyre@mediaplanet.com

Designer: Alana Giordano
alana.giordano@mediaplanet.com

Managing Director: Gustav Aspegren
gustav.aspegren@mediaplanet.com

Contributors: Sabrina Houssami,
Sarah McKenzie, Jasmin Leete,
Glaucoma Australia, Macular
Degeneration Foundation, Vision
Australia, Guide Dogs NSW/ACT,
Vision2020/Vision Initiative,
RANZCO Eye Foundation

Photos: All photos courtesy of
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Distributed within:

The Daily Telegraph, September 2012
This section was created by Mediaplanet
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its Editorial Departments.

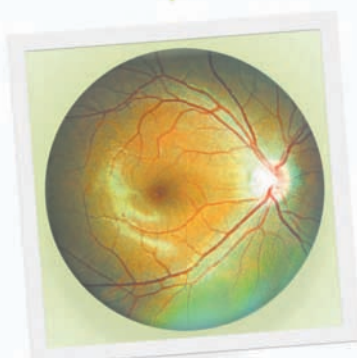
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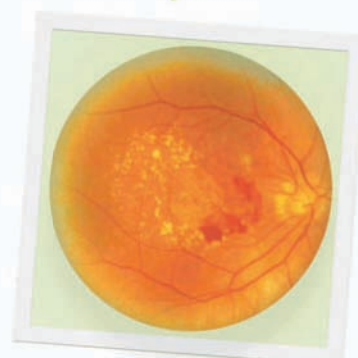


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INSIGHT



A close up on contact lenses

Once regarded as fiddly, irritating or unsuitable for complex vision problems, today's contact lenses provide a clear and comfortable alternative to glasses. But with so many options available, how do you work out which contact lenses are right for you?

es are the other option. These can provide better outcomes for people with more complex vision problems.

Contact lens care for healthy eyes

When looking into contact lenses, you will most likely weigh up factors such as convenience, safety and lifestyle. It is also worth remembering that clean contact lenses ensures healthy eyes.

A daily process of lens care involves careful hand washing before your contact lenses are removed and a lens cleaning solution applied. Each lens should be gently rubbed for at least ten seconds, before being rinsed with a cleaning solution, placed in a lens case filled with fresh solution and soaked for a minimum of six hours.

With recent innovations in contact lens design and lens care products, people who wear glasses can be potential contact lens wearers. Even if you've been put off in the past, perhaps now is the time to take a closer look at whether contact lenses are right for you?

SARAH MCKENZIE

editorial@mediaplanet.com

See your optometrist

Your first port of call should be your optometrist. They will determine what type of contact lens and wearing schedule is most suitable, as well as set regular visits to ensure ongoing eye health.

Innovations in lenses

In up to 90 percent of cases you'll

be prescribed soft contact lenses, manufactured from flexible plastic materials and able to correct most kinds of focusing errors. Most are designed for daily wear with monthly disposable and daily single use contact lenses available, and some can even be worn overnight.

New developments in soft contact lens technology mean that

even those who require multifocal glasses can wear contact lenses. Various contact lens companies produce multifocal contact lenses that use high-precision technology to smoothly transition between near, intermediate and distant vision.

Lauren Richard, optometrist and Professional Affairs Manager

at Alcon Australia, says, "Multifocal contact lenses are great for people in their 40s and 50s who, instead of reaching for reading glasses, want to maintain a youthful appearance. Those that allow oxygen to reach the eye's surface are comfortable to wear all day, every day for healthy-looking eyes."

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Alcon

INSIGHT



HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE EYE HEALTH CHECK-UP AT LEAST EVERY TWO YEARS AT YOUR OPTOMETRIST

SUN DAMAGE AND YOUR EYES

Sun protection

We all love our sunnies, summer and the brighter months approaching. Once the warmer months set in it is easy to forget that the sun can harm our eyes. Frequent exposure to Ultraviolet light from the sun can cause both short term and long term problems, ranging from dry, itchy or painful eyes, to cataracts, macular degeneration and even cancer of the conjunctiva - the membrane that covers the white of the eye.

Around 4300 cases of pterygium per year are treated as a result of excessive exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Pterygium is a type of cataract where the conjunctiva membrane grows over the cornea, and is definitely not a pleasant ailment.

Over exposure...

Sunsmart Victoria suggest that

when we purchase a new pair of sunglasses, we should check that they meet Australian standards (look for 'AS/NZS 1067:2003' on the label) and have a UVR rating of 2 or more. The UVR rating is similar to the Sun Protection Factor (SPF) for sunscreen and is marked on a scale of 0 to 4. In this scale 0 or 1 provide almost no UVR protection and 4 offers the highest protection and glare reduction.

The school rule of 'no hat, no play' is also relevant, no matter what your age. Wide-brimmed and legionnaire hats provide excellent coverage from the sun too.

Feeling the burn?

During the summer months, UV exposure is three times as powerful in comparison to winter months, particularly between 10am and 3pm. However, winter sun can still cause damage too, so it is wise to al-

ways be prepared for times where there is little or no shade. Whether enjoying the beach, skiing the slopes or showing off your UVR-safe sunnies on your luxury yacht it's important to protect your eyes.

Prescription + Protection = Clearer Sight

With the importance of protecting the eyes from the sun becoming more evident in Australia, there are also many new options available for people who require prescriptive eyewear with sun protection. It is now easier than ever to find eyewear in which you can have your prescription fitted with sun protection. Ask your optometrist or eye practitioner today, to help point you in the right direction for protecting your precious eyes from the sun.

JAMIN LEETE

editorial@mediaplanet.com

DON'T MISS!



Geoff Pollard
National Executive Officer, Glaucoma Australia
PHOTO: JORDAN POLLARD

Don't let glaucoma darken your life

There are 300,000 Australians with glaucoma, about the population of Canberra, and you could be one of the estimated 150,000 who don't know they have it.

Early detection is vital to preserve vision because by the time symptoms develop, significant sight loss has usually occurred. Glaucoma is truly the 'sneak thief of sight'.

The optic nerve carries vision messages from the eye to the brain. Glaucoma is a group of diseases that damage this nerve. Vision loss from glaucoma cannot be recovered.

Glaucoma can occur at any age, and the risk increases as you

age. A regular and comprehensive eye check from age 50 is your best defence against all eye diseases, especially glaucoma. If you have risk factors such as a positive family history of glaucoma (ask your family), or are of African descent; start getting regular eye health checks from age 40.

Glaucoma is detected by a simple check of the optic nerve head (the optic disc) at the back of the eye, and tests to measure eye pressure and your field of vision may also be done. Asking your eye health practitioner, "How's my optic disc?" helps to ensure your glaucoma status is being comprehensively reviewed.

Treatment can usually prevent further deterioration and may consist of eye drops and/or laser, and in some cases surgery is used. So don't delay, get your eyes checked by an optometrist or other eye care professional, and protect your precious sight.

GEOFF POLLARD

editorial@mediaplanet.com

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NEWS

HEALTHY CHOICES FOR A BRIGHTER TOMORROW

Vitamins for vision

It has long been thought that popping a daily multivitamin may help us make up for deficiencies in our diet, so it may not come as much surprise to learn that particular vitamins and minerals can benefit our eye health too. In fact, an ongoing study, the age-related eye disease study (AREDS), has found that the use of a specific combination of supplements is effective in slowing the progression of age-related macular degeneration (AMD), the leading cause of blindness in Australia.

The AREDS formula, which combines high-doses of zinc, vitamins C and E, beta-carotene (vitamin A) and copper, is an important component in the management of existing macular degeneration, according to the National Eye Institute. While AMD cannot be cured, the AREDS combination of supplements can significantly lower the risk of progressing to advanced AMD, by as much as



Oily fish such as salmon, paired with iron rich spinach will give your eyes the perfect boost of nutrients.

25 percent. This is because the AREDS formula is a powerful antioxidant, and decreases deterioration of the macula and retina.

In addition to the supplements contained in the AREDS formula, there are other vitamins and minerals that are recognised as being highly beneficial to eye health. Omega 3 fatty acids, folate, vitamins

B6 and B12, lutein and zeaxanthin are particularly beneficial. These vitamins and minerals can be found in foods such as fish, nuts, colourful fruit and vegetables, as well as leafy green vegetables. There is strong evidence that these particular foods are beneficial in preventing eye diseases, particularly macular degeneration.

The Macular Degeneration Foun-

ation highly recommend a low GI diet for optimal eye health, as low GI foods further reduce the risk of developing AMD. For recipe ideas, Macular Degeneration Foundation patron, Ita Buttrose, joined forces with Chef Vanessa Jones to produce over 90 delicious recipes that are ideal for eye health. This book is available for sale on the Macular Degeneration Foundation's website.

Stop your eyes from going up in smoke

Other lifestyle choices that can improve your eye health are regular exercise, protecting your eyes from the sun and not smoking. Vision 2020 Australia/Vision Initiative, together with QUIT Australia explain that smoking can be extremely damaging to the eyes, increasing the chance of developing conditions, such as glaucoma, and accounts for about 20 percent of age-related macular degeneration cases.

TIP

2

A VITAMIN SUPPLEMENT CONTAINING BILBERRY MAY HELP IMPROVE EYE STRAIN PROBLEMS

Furthermore, it is important to note that smokers are three to four times more likely to develop AMD than non-smokers according to Macular Degeneration Foundation. The good news is that by quitting now you will reduce your risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, and you may slow down the rate of deterioration if you do suffer from AMD. Incredibly, twenty years after quitting, an ex-smoker's risk is the same as someone who has never smoked.

All changes to lifestyle should be made in consultation with your eye-care professional or doctor, and regular appointments with your optometrist are advised to give yourself the best chance of optimum eye health.

JASMIN LEETE

editorial@mediaplanet.com

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INSPIRATION

An interview with Ita Buttrose

Discovering a clearer future though prevention



Ita Buttrose
Patron, Macular Degeneration Foundation
PHOTO: MACULAR DEGENERATION FOUNDATION

Question: Why is the prevention of Macular Degeneration important to you?
Answer: My father had Macular Degeneration and I saw the impact this had on him in later life. There are preventive measures to help reduce the risk of developing this disease. These measures also can help to slow down its progression. In my role as Patron of the Macular Degeneration Foundation, I am dedicated to raising awareness of the steps people should take to protect their eyes.

Q: How do Australians know if they are at risk of suffering from Macular Degeneration?

A: There are three key risk factors for Macular Degeneration. The first is age. If you are over 50 you are at risk. Smoking is another risk factor, as is family history. One thing I've noticed since becoming patron is how few people know that a family history of the disease brings with it a high risk of developing this chronic disease. When I tell them I have a 50 percent chance of getting it too,

most people are usually shocked.

Q: What are some of the things you do in your daily routine to promote healthy eyes and prevent MD?

A: I exercise regularly, watch my weight and follow the eating program recommended by the Macular Degeneration Foundation.

This is definitely not a deprivation method of eating. It just means eating a healthy, well-balanced diet that includes fish two to three times a week, dark green leafy vegetables — especially spinach — and fresh fruit daily, and a handful of nuts a week. Choosing low glycemic index carbohydrates and limiting your intake of fats is also important.

I usually exercise every day. I might walk for an hour on some days and swim several laps on another. I also work out at my local gym a couple of times a week. You don't have to follow my regimen though—work out your own but at the very least, do try to walk for at least 30

minutes three times a week. If you get into the habit of eating eye-friendly foods and exercising regularly you will feel much better for it.

Q: How can people prevent Macular Degeneration?

A: It isn't as hard as some might think — adopting some simple preventative measures into their daily life can make all the difference. I follow the Foundation's Eye Health checklist below:

- Have your eyes tested and macula checked on a regular basis
- Do not smoke
- Keep a healthy lifestyle, control your weight and exercise regularly
- Eat fish 2 to 3 times a week
- Eat dark green leafy vegetables and fresh fruit daily
- Choose low glycemic index carbohydrates
- Eat a handful of nuts a week
- Consider an appropriate supplement in consultation with your doctor: 1. Lutein and/or omega-3 supplement: for those who have inadequate leafy greens and/or fish in their diet; 2. Zinc and antioxidant supplement: for those with mid to late stage Macular Degeneration
- Use an Amsler grid for checking for symptoms of Macular Degeneration
- Seek immediate attention from an eye care professional if there are any sudden changes in vision.

Q: Where did you find the inspiration to create your lovely cookbook "Eating for Eye Health — The Macular Degeneration Cookbook?"

A: I'm passionate about making sure all Australians know they can, to a significant degree,

eat away their risk of developing Macular Degeneration and it was exciting to have the opportunity of creating "Eating for Eye Health — The Macular Degeneration Cookbook" in collaboration with talented Sydney chef, Vanessa Jones. We are both proud of this book and all that it offers to people who want the very best for their eye health.

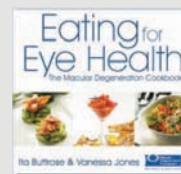
Q: What is one of your favourite recipes from the Eating for Eye Health — The Macular Degeneration Cookbook?

A: What a hard question. There are so many wonderful recipes for cooking and serving

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is filled with beautiful delicious recipes and critical eye health information.

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vegetables, fruit and fish in the cookbook, but I do enjoy whipping up Poached Salmon with Grilled Asparagus and Poached Eggs. It is light and delicious, and excellent for my eye health.

Q: In your opinion, are people aware of the impact of MD and Eye Disease can have on their lifestyle?

A: When I first became patron in 2005 the level of awareness was

extremely low. Most people had no idea what Macular Degeneration was and many of them thought it was associated with a disease of the muscles. In the last seven years, awareness levels have risen dramatically and more people are heeding the message to have their eyes tested and macula checked. We can't however rest on our results and need to continue our awareness raising efforts. We have a great deal more to do on the importance of nutrition, lifestyle and early detection. Never ignoring changes in vision, being aware of symptoms and acting immediately on any changes are critical to saving sight.

Dad was in his mid-eighties when he lost his central vision and it definitely changed his life. As a journalist and author, he had always started his day reading a couple of newspapers. Suddenly this was no longer possible. As a journalist and author myself I couldn't imagine not being able to ever read again. I was as devastated about Dad's fate as he was.

Unless you have witnessed a loved one or friend living with the challenges of vision loss, and appreciate how the simplest activities and joys of life can become great challenges, it is hard to believe "it could happen to me".

Q: How precious is good eye health for you?

A: Extremely. I get my macula checked annually and when my eye specialist tells me my "macula is in pristine condition" his words are music to my ears and I just about dance out of his surgery, one of the happiest women in the world!

MISCHA WATTS

editorial@mediaplanet.com

WHAT IS MACULAR DEGENERATION?

Macular Degeneration (MD) is the name given to a group of degenerative retinal eye diseases that cause progressive loss of central vision, leaving the peripheral or side vision intact. The macula is the central part of the retina, the light sensitive tissue at the back of the eye. The front of the eye focuses images onto the retina which processes all visual images. It is responsible for your ability to read, recognise faces, drive and see colours clearly. You are reading this information using your macula.

How common is MD?

Macular Degeneration is the leading cause of blindness and

severe vision loss in Australia. One in seven people over the age of 50 years (one million people) show some evidence of this disease. It primarily affects our aged population and is often referred to as Age-related Macular Degeneration or AMD.

What are the risk factors for MD?

Macular Degeneration is thought to be caused by genetic and environmental factors. People over the age of 50 years are at risk, those with a direct family history have a 50% chance of developing the disease and if you smoke or have smoked you have 3 to 4 times the risk.

What are the types of MD?

There are two types of Macular Degeneration. The Dry form results in a gradual loss of central vision. The Wet form is characterised by a sudden loss of vision and is caused by abnormal blood vessels growing into the retina. Immediate medical attention is essential if symptoms occur.

What treatments are available for Macular Degeneration?

There is presently no cure for Macular Degeneration. However the treatment of the wet form of Macular Degeneration has changed dramatically over the last 5 years and treatment can

save sight. This is dependent upon early detection and quick access to treatment. Unfortunately for the dry form there is no treatment available as yet. Diet and lifestyle measures can help to reduce the progression of both dry and wet MD.

Early detection is important

The early detection of any form of MD is crucial because the earlier you seek treatment, the more likely you are to have a better outcome compared to those who wait. MD can cause many different symptoms. Any changes in vision should never be ignored and an appointment made with an eye care professional as a matter of

urgency. Difficulty with vision should never be dismissed as part of just 'getting older'. You can have the very early stages of MD without knowing and before any visual symptoms occur, so having an eye test and macula check is essential. Early detection can allow you to take steps to slow the progression of MD. Over 50? Call 1 800 111 709 for a free information kit.

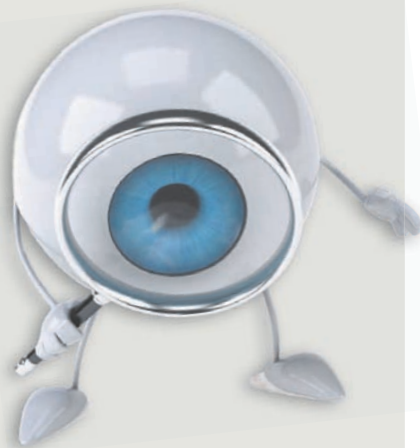
JULIE HERAGHTY,
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER,
MACULAR DEGENERATION
FOUNDATION

editorial@mediaplanet.com

NEWS



FACTS: STAY IN THE KNOW ABOUT DRY EYE



Symptoms of dry eyes:

- Pain or burning sensation in the eye
- A gritty or scratchy feeling in the eye
- Itchiness
- Redness of the eye
- Tired eyes or heavy eye lids
- Blurred vision at times

What other things may contribute to dry eyes?

- Air conditioning or environmental elements
- Extended periods of using the computer
- Post laser eye surgery and cataract surgery
- Some medical illnesses such as glaucoma and stroke
- Some medications

MISCHA WATTS

editorial@mediaplanet.com



NO NEED TO CRY OVER DRY EYES

With much of our life being spent indoors or in an air conditioned environment, dry eyes are becoming increasingly common. We look at the treatments available that provide comfort and relief for dry eyes.

Approximately 120,000 Australians suffer from significant dry eye syndrome — a chronic dry eye condition. For most of us, dry eyes are temporary and can be treated with a warm compress and a good night's sleep, but for a chronic sufferer, symptoms such as dry, gritty eyes, burning, itchiness, blurred vision and eye redness are a regular occurrence, and can be quite debilitating. After all, we blink about 11,500 times a day, and for a dry eye sufferer, each of those blinks may cause discomfort or pain. Without treatment, dry eyes can result

in surface cell damage and sometimes deterioration of eyesight. The good news is that although many people do suffer from dry eye syndrome, there are effective, easy and innovative treatments available.

Do I have dry eyes?

The symptoms of dry eyes range from experiencing mild discomfort, to severely debilitating eye problems.

Some of the symptoms can include a scratchy or gritty feeling in your eyes, or aching eyes. Dry eyes can also give the sufferer a feeling like there is something foreign in their eye, or cause sensitivity to light. Tired or heavy eyelids are also a key factor in dry eyes. People tend to find that these symptoms are particularly noticeable when reading or using the computer, or when the eye is strained. For some people they may even notice that their

eyes can easily flair up after they have been exposed to smoke or fragrances. Considering that these symptoms can range from mild to severe, it is important to talk to your optometrist or eye practitioner about your symptoms. Prompt treatment for dry eyes is important to stop the vicious cycle that can turn a mild issue into something that can become debilitating for some.

Why are tears important?

Tears are very important for our overall eye health, as they help to bathe the surface of the eye and wash away any dust or particles. This ensures that the eye stays healthy and that vision is kept clear.

There are two main types of dry eye syndrome; Aqueous deficient dry eye, is caused by a lack of watery tear production by the lacrimal gland. Evaporative dry eye,

which is the most common form is caused by blockage of the meibomian glands, which normally produces a fatty-oil that protects the aqueous tear layer. Both types of dry eye cause the tears to evaporate too quickly, leaving the eye surface exposed to damage.

Dry eye can be exacerbated by a number of things, such as medications, a dry or air-conditioned environment as well as some medical conditions. However, advancing age is the number one cause. It is especially prevalent in menopausal females and is also closely linked with Glaucoma. Prompt treatment for dry eyes is important to stop the vicious cycle that can turn a mild issue into something that is debilitating. Dry eyes can also be brought on by a previous eye surgery, but rest assure, there are ways to find comfort.

JASMIN LEETE

editorial@mediaplanet.com

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ALLERGAN
Eye Care

AU-0008/2012

FREEDOM FROM DRY EYES



DRY EYE PREVENTION

- ➔ Almost everyone has experienced a feeling of 'dry eye' at some time.
- ➔ Some people have very mild dry eye, which causes only a temporary irritation. But dry eye can also be a long-term condition associated with great discomfort or pain, and can affect your vision.
- ➔ Dry eye is common but people who experience this condition should not think they that they have to endure it.
- ➔ Improvements in treatment and diagnosis mean nearly all dry eye patients can experience relief of their symptoms with appropriate therapy.

SOURCE: OPTOMETRISTS ASSOCIATION AUSTRALIA
editorial@mediaplanet.com

Luckily, there are some outstanding dry eye treatments on the market. There have been many advances in products that are now available for dry eye sufferers. Eye drops are affordable, simple to use and provide excellent relief for dry eyes. Many work by replacing the natural tear layer with safe, artificial tears. Eye drops and ointments can be purchased over the counter at the pharmacy and are formulated to help soothe the eyes effectively. There are many different types of eye drops and ointments avail-

able, and some are particularly formulated to provide long term relief. Eye drops can give enormous comfort for contact lens wearers who suffer from dry eyes.

Another way in which sufferers can find comfort from dry eyes, is through vitamins. It has been shown that taking a supplement containing Omega-3 and vitamin E can also help relieve the eyes significantly. Recent research has shown this combination to be extremely effective for many people who suffer from dry eyes.

For those who suffer from severe, sometimes debilitating dry eyes, there is an innovative technology now available called LipiFlow™. In this treatment a dish-shaped inflatable bladder is inserted on the inside of the eyelids while a gentle heating pad puts gentle pressure on the outside, stimulating the meibomian glands in order to unblock them. This revolutionary treatment only takes 12 minutes per eye, is painless, and 79% of patients report noticeable improvement after one treatment.

As there are so many effective treatments now available, there is no need to suffer from dry eyes. With a huge range of treatments available, there is no need to suffer any more.

See your optometrist, eye care practitioner or chat to your pharmacist to find comfort and relief for yourself today.

JASMIN LEETE
editorial@mediaplanet.com

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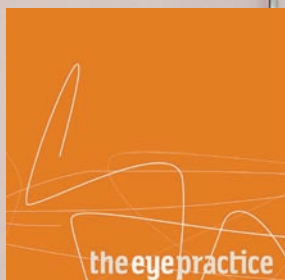
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NEWS



QUESTION & ANSWER



Dr. Michael Lawless
MBBS, FRANZCO, FRACS, FRCOphth,
Vision Eye Institute
PHOTO: VISION EYE INSTITUTE

What are some of the latest innovations in laser eye surgery?

In the past, laser eye surgery took a 'one size fits all' approach, which worked well for most people. However, like 'regular size' socks, they fit some people perfectly and fit most pretty well.

Today, laser vision correction procedures can be tailored to take into account the unique anatomy of each patient. Every eye is different, including the shape of the cornea (the front surface of the eye) and the length of the eye.

The latest innovations have allowed laser eye surgeons to map the unique features of the eyes, and then using this information to perform laser eye surgery that produces vision as good as or better than glasses or contact lenses for many people.

What important things should people keep in mind when they are considering laser eye surgery?

When choosing a surgeon, the essential factors to research are their experience, the technology they use and their willingness to communicate openly.

Not everyone is suitable for the

most common vision correction procedure, LASIK. Some are better suited to laser on the surface of the cornea (ASLA or PRK), some may be suited to an implantable lens, while some aren't suitable for any form of treatment. It's vital that the surgeon outlines exactly what is right for an individual.

It's important to have realistic expectations, as the eye naturally changes throughout a person's life. A 20 year old could find that they have an excellent result that suits them for years to come, or they may need further surgery in their 30s. Patients can have laser eye surgery at any age.

What eye disorders or eye problems can laser eye surgery treat?

Laser procedures such as LASIK and ASLA (PRK) treat optical errors, including myopia (short sightedness), hyperopia (long sightedness), astigmatism and presbyopia, or some of these in combination.

Other surgical procedures that can correct visual errors include lens surgery. Until recently all lens and cataract surgery was performed manually. Since April 2011 technology has been available in Australia to allow a laser to replace a blade during the first three steps. Recently published data confirms that laser lens surgery and laser cataract surgery offers benefits in terms of safety and accuracy.

Laser lens surgery involves removing the natural lens of the eye and replacing it with an artificial intraocular lens. A typical patient is 50+ and wants to reduce their dependency on glasses, but is not suitable for laser surgery.

MISCHA WATTS

editorial@mediaplanet.com



TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE, THAT IS THE QUESTION

Is laser eye surgery for me?

If you're Australian, there's a 50 per cent chance that you rely on glasses or contact lenses to see clearly. As a sight-challenged Aussie, I wear both and though I'm thankful for the temporary vision-boost they grant, I have always wondered what it would be like to experience the freedom of life without vision aids as a result of laser eye surgery.

What if we could wake up with perfect vision every day? Laser eye surgery technology has been available to us for two decades now and it's about time we open our eyes (pun intended) to the benefits.

A positive outlook

Leading Australian bridal couturier, Steven Khalil, underwent laser eye surgery just last month and he's found out firsthand how beneficial it is. "As bridal gown design is all about fine detail, it is of utmost importance for me to achieve the best possible vision. I'll admit, the surgery was such an easy process and completely stress free." Khalil even confesses that his recovery period was so fast that he drove himself to his follow-up appointment the very next morning, free of any vision aids!

It sounds too good to be true, but in this case, it simply isn't. Laser eye surgery is continuously evolving, introducing new and improved technologies that correct a whole

host of vision impairments, ranging from myopia and hyperopia (short- and long-sightedness) to astigmatism, presbyopia, cataracts and retina diseases such as macular degeneration. And for the three percent of us suffering from glaucoma, laser eye surgery can outright prevent blindness, which is a possible outcome when the disease is left untreated.

"LASER EYE SURGERY IS CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVING, INTRODUCING NEW AND IMPROVED TECHNOLOGIES THAT CORRECT A WHOLE HOST OF VISION IMPAIRMENTS."

Innovations in the industry

Better yet, the surgery has now developed to offer 'all laser' technology for those of us who are squeamish about blades and incisions. The process, which involves

using a femtosecond laser known as 'IntraLase', produces an accurate corneal flap in around fifteen seconds by generating microscopic bubbles that separate the corneal layers. It's only a little costlier than traditional laser eye surgery, which uses a tiny bladed device called a microkeratome to create a self-healing flap of corneal tissue and starts from just \$1,500 per eye. And payment plans are available through different eye clinics, just to make it that much easier for us to access this life-changing technology.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder

The beauty of laser eye surgery, aside from its efficacy and speediness, is that it's completely customisable depending on your eye issue. The success rate is huge: 99.9% of laser eye surgery works, and it is the most common operation performed worldwide. As Khalil puts it, "I have become the biggest ambassador of laser eye surgery — people are always telling me their fears, but I can honestly say that it was unbelievably simple. If you are thinking of doing it, I wouldn't hesitate — it's a small miracle." A small miracle? Yes, please. It's time to seek advice on the right laser eye surgery for you.

SABRINA HOUSSAMI

editorial@mediaplanet.com

How do you choose the right laser eye surgeon?

Laser eye surgery is a decision for life. So, it's important to do your research and ensure that you make the right choice.

Vision Eye Institute surgeons have unparalleled experience, access to a choice of the latest technologies, the ability to offer all forms of vision correction procedures and the respect of their peers worldwide.

If you want to be absolutely certain that you've made the right choice, make sure you do your homework — visit the Vision Eye Institute website or call for an information pack.

Bondi Junction clinic:

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Chatswood clinic:

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Dr. Jim Kokkinakis
BOptom FAAO ISCLS GCOT,
The Eye Practice,
Senior Lecturer, University of NSW
PHOTO: THE EYE PRACTICE



Barry Clenner
Senior Optometrist Dental
and Eyecare Practices,
Medibank Group
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Question 1:
Why is it important for Australians to have regular eye examinations?

Most of the common eye diseases like macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy have no symptoms or pain until very late in the process. Often this is at a time when things can be irrecoverable. Intervention at an early stage though invariably has a favourable outcome. It stands to reason then that the best insurance policy against blinding eye diseases is to have regular eye examinations that go beyond just testing for glasses. Apart from blinding eye diseases it is also possible to observe the blood vessel structure at the back of the eye and detect systemic problems such as high blood pressure, impending stroke, diabetes and even brain tumours.

Our eyes are constantly undergoing changes throughout our life, and our risk of eye disease increases after the age of 50. Some eye diseases and vision problems may not always present with obvious symptoms, which means that many people are unaware that a problem even exists. In order to detect any vision problems as early as possible, you should attend regular eye examinations every two years. Early detection and diagnosis allows for more effective management and treatment of eye disease. It also can assist in maintaining good vision, and in some cases, the prevention of permanent loss of vision.

Question 2:
In your opinion, how can Australians look after their eyes?

There are a number of important things that we all need to be aware of: 1. Regular eye exams at least every two years, 2. Fish Oil and Lutein Supplements have recently been shown to be beneficial for ongoing eye health, 3. Using good quality wrap around sunglasses, 4. Keeping your eyes well lubricated with preservative free eye drops is especially important for office and computer workers in air conditioning, 5. Children in particular are prone to developing myopia (short-sightedness) by excessive use of electronic devices.

Whilst age is the biggest risk factor in deteriorating eye health, there are some things that can be done which may potentially slow down the onset of age-related eye diseases, 1. Reduce the time spent in front of the computer or television and make sure to give your eyes a rest during the day, 2. If your family has any pre-existing history of eye disease make sure that you have your eyes checked on a more regular basis especially if you experience any symptoms, 3. Maintain a healthy diet, avoid smoking and exercise regularly; Again, having regular eye examinations every two years, will allow for the detection of any eye problems and eye disease as early as possible.

Question 3:
How have eye problems changed in modern times?

In modern times we have seen an exponential increase eyestrain and myopia due to overuse of electronic devices. Eyes have not evolved to read. Human eyes are designed to focus in the distance with small amounts of close work. What is interesting is that we also have an exponential increase in dry eye problems. Studies have shown that when one reads or views a computer blinking rates reduce to 30 percent of normal. This over exposes the eyes to the environment which in turn dehydrates them and can in some cases cause significant to debilitating irritation. With urbanisation this has changed dramatically to the point where many of us do not get any outdoor activity. Consequently reading and computer work dominates our vision. It is important to try and reduce all types of eye strain by having regular eye examinations. Apart from reducing the incidence of preventable blindness, correcting eye strain problems will make people more productive and less physically fatigued.

The way that we use our eyes and the stress we place upon them has changed dramatically in recent times. Our increased exposure to computerised technology, especially for those of us in an office environment, has placed a greater demand on our eyes and leads to increased focusing problems. Children are also being exposed to excessive close up activities including prolonged computer usage and television viewing. The ageing population is also another major factor in an increased prevalence of eye disease. At the same time however, state-of-the-art equipment and more advances in medicine have allowed for earlier detection, and more effective treatment of eye diseases.

TIP
3
SOME EYESIGHT PROBLEMS IN CHILDREN CAN MANIFEST AS LEARNING DIFFICULTIES. ENSURE REGULAR CHECK-UPS FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Seeing through the eyes of a child

The impact that poor vision can have on a child is enormous. Vision problems can affect their learning significantly, Jared Slater of the Optometrist Association Australia talks about the importance of regular eye tests for children.

Good vision is important for a child's educational, physical and social development. Vision problems can make learning difficult and prevent children from achieving their full potential.



Jared Slater
Professional Services Manager,
Optometrists Association Australia

Vision problems may contribute to learning difficulties in reading, writing, viewing a whiteboard, computer use and other classroom activities.

Many children do not know they could see better. Parents and teachers are best placed to detect signs of a potential problem including avoidance of reading and writing, lower comprehension and short attention span. Sometimes these issues are incorrectly attributed to dyslexia or attention deficits.

The most common vision problems in school-aged children affect the ability to see clearly and can be corrected with spectacles or con-

tact lenses. These problems include short-sightedness (blurred distance vision), longsightedness (difficulty focusing up close) and astigmatism (vision distortion).

Amblyopia (a turned eye) usually occurs before age five but vision in the lazy eye can be improved if detected and treated early.

Babies have their eyes tested at birth but if you suspect an eye or vision problem in your baby or child or there is a family history of poor vision, have their eyes tested promptly. Vision screening is sometimes offered at school and usually com-

prises limited tests. A thorough eye examination by an optometrist usually takes 30 minutes and is covered by a Medicare rebate. No referral is needed.

- Performance issues that may indicate your child has a vision problem:
- Skipping or re-reading lines
 - Omitting or confusing words when reading
 - Poor comprehension when reading
 - Homework taking longer than it should
 - Short attention span with reading and school work
 - Difficulty learning to read

- Other signs include:
- Frequent blinking or rubbing eye
 - Red or watery eyes
 - Covering or closing one eye

- Holding a book very close to read
 - Squinting or sitting very close when watching television
 - Complaints of headaches or blurred or double vision
 - Difficulty recognising familiar people in the distance
 - Sensitivity to light
 - Tilting head noticeably
 - One eye turns in or out while the other points straight ahead
 - Poor hand-eye coordination
- For more information or to find an optometrist see www.optometrists.asn.au.

NEWS

Kirk Pengilly: Parents get your children's eyes tested

Eyesight is a gift for all of us to treasure. Kirk Pengilly from INXS truly understands how precious eyesight is.

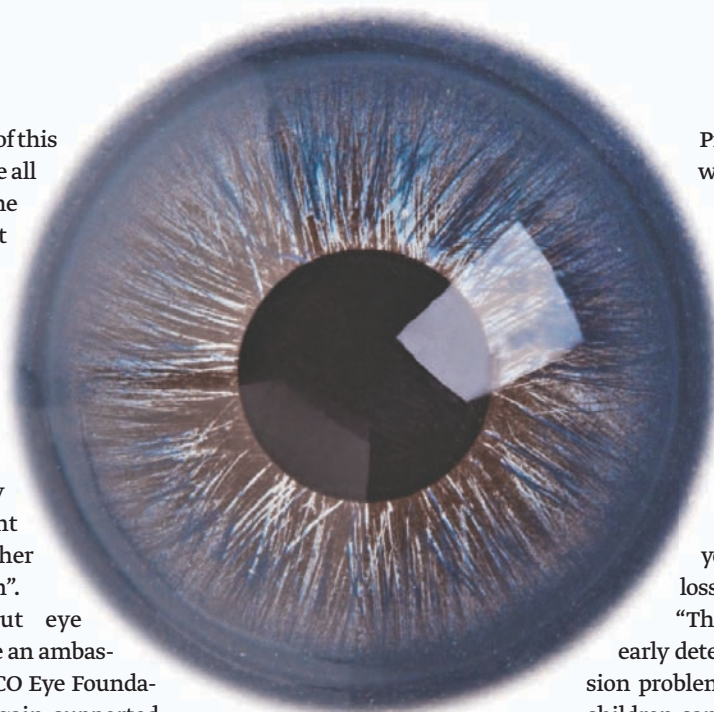
Kirk Pengilly, best known as the guitarist, saxophonist and principal backing vocalist of the iconic Australian rock band, INXS, is also well recognized for wearing his trademark black glasses. For Kirk his glasses represent far more than a fashion statement, having experienced vision issues, Kirk says eyesight is a gift to be cherished and one which should be protected at all costs.

"I've worn glasses almost all my life to see clearly as I am long-sighted," says Kirk.

"In 1985, I came extremely close to losing my sight to glaucoma. Thankfully my optometrist diagnosed the glaucoma quickly. When diagnosed

with an eye disease of this kind, time will make all the difference in the long-term effects it will have on you. Due to how severe my glaucoma was, I was fast tracked to a pioneering Australian ophthalmologist who quickly treated my deteriorating sight and prevented further damage to my vision".

Passionate about eye health, Kirk became an ambassador of The RANZCO Eye Foundation in 2007 and again supported JuleYE's 2012 Campaign. This year Kirk supported the RANZCO Eye Foundation's call for a national eye-screening program to be put in place especially for pre-school children. Eye disorders are one of



the most common yet overlooked long-term health problems experienced by children in Australia. During 2006-07, nearly 9,000 children were hospitalized with eye disease and disorders.

Professor Frank Martin, world-renowned paediatric ophthalmologist and RANZCO Eye Foundation Board Member says, "Children rarely complain about eye problems and often poor eyesight goes undetected. If problems are not picked up during the first few years, damage and vision loss may be permanent.

"The good news is, with early detection, the common vision problems among school-aged children can be easily managed or corrected. This is the driving force behind the RANZCO Eye foundation's impassioned call for a national eye screening program to ensure no child misses out on this all-important check," says Professor Martin.

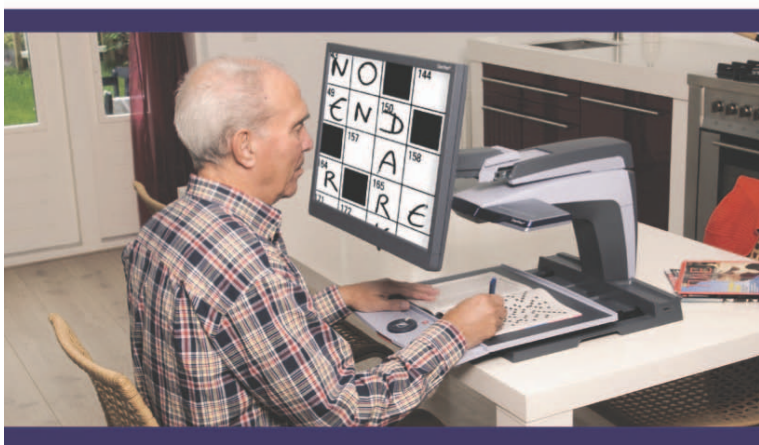
Kirk Pengilly understands firsthand the importance of eyesight and protecting that of his daughter's, April. "Finding out I had glaucoma when I was in my mid 20s, in addition to my mother having macular degeneration, I certainly felt the importance of informing my daughter April of our family's eye health history and encouraging her to start getting her eyes checked every couple of years.

"My main message to parents is that they should consider the fact that eye health is just as important as any other health issue that you have or need to look after. Even if you, or your family members, don't have a history of eye disease it's so important to have your eyes checked regularly," said Kirk Pengilly.

RANZCO EYE FOUNDATION
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Do you know someone who has low vision?

For those living with vision impairment, day-to-day life can be difficult. Fortunately, there is now a huge range of solutions and new technologies that can help make life easier for people who do suffer from low vision.

Support services

Agencies such as Vision Australia and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT assist by acting as central points from which individuals and carers can access services, practical information and advocacy.

Crucially, these organisations provide free vision assessments where clients receive individualised advice and training on using specific aids and equipment to make daily life easier. If you do know someone who does suffer from low vision, it is definitely worthwhile encouraging them to reach out to these organisations, as these organisations provide effective support and care.

Advances in technology

Many of us are familiar with some of the tradition vision aids, such as long canes and guide dogs. Other

useful vision aids such as talking watches, pocket lights, magnifiers and large print books also make reading and writing easier.

However, new technologies offer exciting opportunities. Traditional 'looking glass' products are being replaced with text-to-speech synthesisers and with desktop and handheld magnifiers that offer adjustable magnification, contrast and brightness options. Meanwhile, talking GPS software for mobile phones and handheld devices is being increasingly utilised in conjunction with canes and guide dogs to increase mobility, safety and independence.

"It's exciting to see some features moving into mainstream devices like smart phones," says Luisa Ferronato, Manager of Assistive Technology Services at Vision Australia.

There are also exciting new products available which bring hope to those whose life has been darkened due to vision loss. These sensational new developments can ensure that a happy and active lifestyle is continued after vision loss, and that it is not the be all and end all. These products ensure that the

sufferer can still enjoy hobbies and a healthy lifestyle, with the help of these new vision aids.

David Woodbridge, Senior Adaptive Technology Consultant at Vision Australia, adds, "Digital set top boxes now let you hear channel and program information, and soon will provide audio descriptions to explain what's happening on screen. Many cinemas also provide headsets with audio descriptions.

"Such developments are game changers," David says. "These new technologies empower people with vision impairment. They really nail independence."

These wonderful new developments in low vision aids can greatly improve the lifestyle of people who suffer from low vision. If you do know someone who suffers from a vision impairment, help them gain independence and hope by contacting Vision Australia or Guide Dogs NSW/ACT. Reach out today and make the future brighter and clear for your loved one.

SARAH MCKENZIE
editorial@mediaplanet.com