

Dry Eyes

Human eyes have tear glands which produce tears for our eyes. There are two kinds of tear glands: the small glands which constantly produce small amount of tears that lubricate eyes to keep them healthy and comfortable; and the bigger glands that make a large amount of tears when we cry or experience discomfort in our eyes, as in the case of dry eye condition. Many middle-aged or elderly people (especially women) suffer from dry eye condition due to the dysfunction of small tear glands. Therefore, the big glands will overcompensate and produce too much tears. With the use of lubricating eye drops, the big tear glands will reduce tearing. Other conditions, such as tear duct blockage, can also cause tearing eyes. You will need to consult an ophthalmologist for proper treatment.

Presbyopia (Difficulty in Reading or Seeing Near Objects)

The normal human eye is capable of adjusting its focus due to small eye muscle functions and elasticity of the lens, which decline with age. Presbyopia usually appears after 40 years of age, and the eye would become like a camera which is not equipped with auto-focus. If you are nearsighted, you may notice that it is easier to read without reading glasses. However, those with farsightedness may find reading increasingly difficult. Presbyopia can be corrected by glasses. Recently, there are presbyopic contact lenses available. Another option is to have your presbyopia treated with cataract surgery.

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OPH-1191D/E-03-112015

Common Eye Diseases of Seniors

Like the rest of our body, our eyes undergo changes as we grow older. Many people are under the misconception that deterioration of eyesight in seniors is inevitable and untreatable, resulting in the neglect of due eye care. The fact is, modern advances in the eye care field have brought methods of prevention and cure to many common senior eye diseases. This pamphlet aims to provide you with some general information on common eye diseases as well as their prevention and cure.

Cataract

Cataract is the clouding of our crystalline lens. It obstructs the passage of light into the eye, which affects vision. Patients feel as though they are seeing through very dirty glasses. Cataract can be caused by many reasons, the most common of which is age-related lens degeneration. Common symptoms are as follows:

- Blurry vision, especially at night
- Sensitivity to light, seeing shadows or halos
- Frequent change of glasses with no improvement in vision
- Colours appear darker, greyer and duller

The modern treatment method for cataract is surgical removal of the cloudy lens and placement of a permanent artificial implant. A frequently asked question from patients is “When do I need cataract surgery?”. The answer is: when you feel that your daily life is affected by your unsatisfactory vision, you should consider cataract surgery. You do not need to wait until the cataract progresses into an advanced stage. The success rate of modern cataract surgery is extremely high and brings with it the additional benefits of improving your preexisting nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism and presbyopia. Your doctor can further explain in detail when you undergo an eye examination.

Glaucoma

In Hong Kong, glaucoma is a common cause of blindness, with elderly people at a higher risk. Glaucoma is classified into acute, chronic, congenital and secondary. Chronic glaucoma is the most common type, accounting for 60-70% of all glaucoma cases. Early glaucoma often goes unnoticed by patients because there would be no pain or any effect on vision at this stage. But the increase in eye pressure will gradually damage eye nerves and reduce the visual field, ultimately leading to blindness. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that senior people, especially those with a family history of glaucoma, should undergo regular eye check-ups.

There are several methods to treat glaucoma, namely medicine, laser and surgery. Although glaucoma is a potentially blinding disease, it can be controlled if discovered in its early stage.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration

Macula is a special area in the central retina, made up of many small and sensitive nerve cells. We need a healthy macula to see details, read and see colours. When the macula is diseased, vision will be reduced and/or distorted.

Macular degeneration is mostly age-related. In Asia, there has been an increasing incidence of macular degeneration in recent years. High nearsightedness is also a major cause of macular degeneration. Much research has been devoted to discovering safe and effective treatment for the disease. Some are best treated with laser or intraocular injection of special medicine, while others may need special magnifying devices.

Diabetic Retinal Diseases

Diabetic retinal diseases are due to small blood vessel abnormalities caused by diabetes, resulting in a series of complications in the ocular fundus, including macular bleeding, swelling, lipid leakage, new abnormal blood vessel growth, vitreous bleeding, retinal detachment, glaucoma, etc. Such retinal diseases can cause blindness if they are not treated promptly. In the early stage, you may not notice visual changes; the diseases can only be discovered by eye examination. Therefore, patients with diabetes should have regular eye examinations and follow-up appointments.

Diabetic retinal diseases can be treated with laser or special medication to prevent serious complications, such as fundus bleeding, retinal detachment and neovascular glaucoma, which can cause blindness.

Floaters

Floaters is a very common symptom among the elderly, mostly caused by degeneration of the vitreous gel inside the eyes. They usually come and go without affecting vision. As long as the retinal problems are ruled out during eye check-ups, no treatment is required. However, serious retinal or vitreous diseases, such as vitreous haemorrhage, retinal tears or detachment can also cause acute onset of floaters. Therefore, it is important that you consult an ophthalmologist at the earliest opportunity for a detailed check-up if you start seeing floaters.

