



Eye Myths and Facts

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You may have heard someone say, "Doing that will hurt your eyes!" But is it true? Learn the true facts about the following eye-related myths.

Myth: "Reading in dim light is harmful to your eyes."

Fact: It does not harm your eyes to read in dim light. But good lighting can make it easier to see what you are reading and help prevent uncomfortable eye strain.

Myth: "Using computers can damage your eyes."

Fact: Looking at a computer screen will not harm your eyes. But when you use a computer (or read a book, or do other close-up work) for a long period of time, you do not blink very often. You can have dry, red eyes and blurry vision. To relieve your eyes, take a break about every 20 minutes. Look up or across the room. You might also use artificial tears to keep your eyes moist.

Myth: "Wearing the wrong eyeglasses will hurt your eyes."

Fact: Eyeglasses are designed to make your vision clearer. If you wear glasses that are not the correct prescription, it will not damage your eyes. However, you may feel eye strain. Your eyes may feel achy and vision may be blurry. You may also get a headache. This should go away when you take the glasses off.

Wearing the wrong eyeglass prescription is mostly an inconvenience. However, it is more serious for some. Children under 8 years old who need glasses should always wear the correct eyeglass prescription. This can prevent them from getting amblyopia (also called "lazy eye"). Amblyopia is when vision in one eye is weaker than the other.

Myth: "Children will outgrow crossed eyes."

Fact: Children do not outgrow misaligned or "crossed" eyes (called strabismus).

This eye problem needs to be treated as soon as possible. A child with strabismus may develop poor vision in one eye. This is because the brain "turns off" or ignores the image from the misaligned or lazy eye.



"Lazy eye" is often treated by patching or blurring the strong eye, forcing the weaker eye to work.

Myth: "Learning disabilities are caused by eye problems."

Fact: A child has a learning disability if he or she has problems reading, doing math, or learning. Studies show that vision problems do not cause learning disabilities. Also, eye exercises do not improve learning problems. Learning disabilities are caused by problems with how the brain processes the words or numbers it sees.

Sometimes, poor vision can be mistaken for a learning disability. Someone can have trouble reading simply because the words appear blurry.

Do you suspect your child has a learning disability? Have them checked by a learning specialist *and* an eye care provider who can rule out any vision problems.

Myth: "Sitting very close to the TV can damage a child's eyes."

Fact: Children can focus comfortably at very close distances better than adults. Studies show that sitting very close to the television does not damage a child's vision. Nor does holding a book very close to the eyes while reading. Young children usually stop doing this as they grow older.

However, children who have myopia (nearsightedness) may sit very near the TV to see the picture clearly. Children should have regular eye exams so any vision problems can be caught early.

Myth: "People with weak eyes or who wear glasses will wear out their eyes sooner if they read fine print or do a lot of close-up work."

Fact: Using your eyes for any kind of reading or detail work does not wear them out. Think of your eye as a camera. A camera will not wear out sooner if you take a lot of close-up pictures.

Long hours of reading or close-up work can strain your eyes, making them tired. Simply resting your eyes periodically by gazing into the distance can relieve them, though.

Myth: "Wearing eyeglasses or contact lenses will make you dependent on them."

Fact: Eyeglasses and contact lenses are used to correct blurry vision. In a way, you already are dependent on them, as they help you see clearly! But your uncorrected vision (vision without eyeglasses or contact lenses) does not get worse because you wear them.

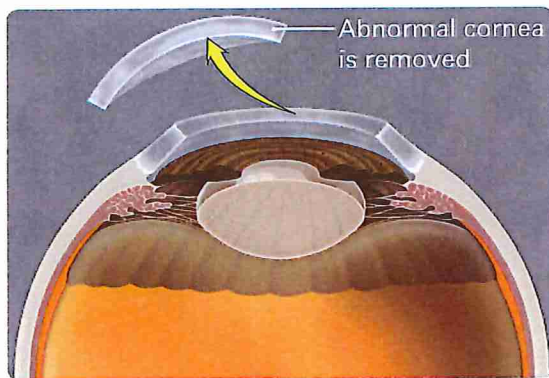
Myth: "A cataract must be 'ripe' before it is removed."

Fact: Years ago, it was thought that a cataract had to reach a specific stage (be "ripe") to be removed. But a cataract can be removed as soon as it affects your vision.

Talk with an ophthalmologist if a cataract is keeping you from seeing well enough to do daily tasks. Surgery is the only way to remove a cataract.

Myth: "Eyes can be transplanted."

Fact: The eye is connected to the brain by the optic nerve. This nerve is made of more than a million tiny nerve fibers. To transplant an eye, all of those nerve fibers would have to be reconnected to the brain. That is impossible. But it is possible to transplant the cornea (clear front part of your eye). In fact, ophthalmologists have been doing this type of transplant surgery for many years. A corneal transplant is not the same as an eye transplant.



In corneal transplant surgery, a donor cornea (the clear front part of the eye) replaces a damaged cornea.

Myth: "All eye doctors are the same."

Fact: Ophthalmologists, optometrists and opticians each play an important role in providing eye care. But their levels of training and expertise are quite different from each other.

An **ophthalmologist** is a medical doctor (M.D.) or a doctor of osteopathy (D.O.) trained and licensed in medical and surgical treatment of all eye diseases or abnormalities. They complete at least 12 years of training, including 4 years of college and at least 8 years of additional medical training. An ophthalmologist is the only eye care provider worldwide who is licensed to practice both medicine *and* surgery. Ophthalmologists are also involved in scientific research on the causes and cures for eye diseases and vision disorders.

An **optometrist** is a doctor of optometry (O.D.) trained and licensed to provide some aspects of eye care. They complete at least 3 years of college and 4 years of optometry training from a college of optometry. They are licensed to do eye exams and vision tests, prescribe and dispense corrective lenses, detect certain eye abnormalities, and prescribe medicine for some eye diseases. In most states, they cannot prescribe certain medicines or perform eye surgery.

An **optician** is not an eye doctor. They are professionals who prepare, measure and adapt the fit of eyeglass or contact prescriptions written by an ophthalmologist or optometrist. An optician has a minimum of a 2-year degree in opticianry or a 6,000-hour apprenticeship education and is licensed in their state.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

