

# What I should know about the EYE?

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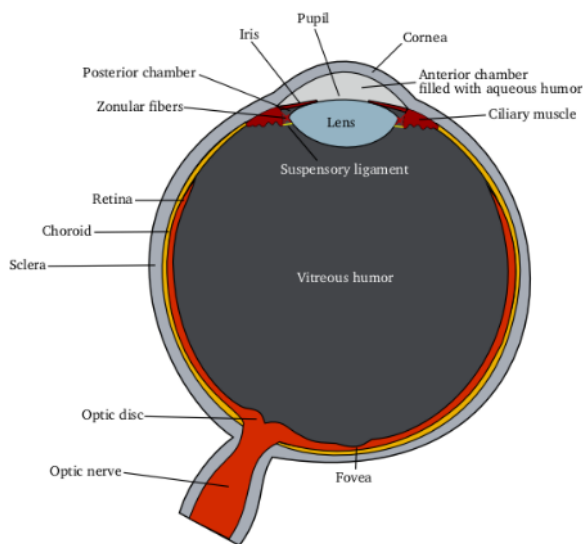
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## What I should know about the EYE?

- Dr Balakrishna BN

The eye plays a very important part in our functional, fruitful life. Almost every person would dread to lead a life without normal vision. We cannot imagine how we would go about our daily life without the vision we are accustomed to. This dependence on vision & the fear of what would happen if the vision is compromised is what leads people to believe facts which are not true, follow lifestyles which do more harm than good, & attempt treatment of normal ageing changes & also to not treat conditions which deserve treatment. So let me start this writing with the intention to clear some of those doubts. I would be doing all the readers injustice if I do not stress on the fact that knowing & understanding the English language is different from understanding medicine & this article should only reduce your worry by directing you to an appropriate doctor at the right time.



### Diseases part of the Ageing eye

#### *1 Drooping of lids [ptosis]*

It is caused by age related changes leading to weakening of the muscle apparatus which, in normal people results in lifting the upper eyelid. This weakening results in less efficient lifting of the upper lid. It does not cause any other visual problem until it's severe enough to cover more than half the eye. Sometimes just

overhanging brow skin also gives the impression of ptosis. More important would be to note any increase in drooping during the course of the day, which might be an indicator of myasthenia gravis, a systemic problem, which needs to be seen by a physician. Ptosis causing visual or cosmetic problem can be corrected surgically.

## 2. out turning or in turning of eyelids/ eyelashes [ectropion / entropion]

### a. Ectropion

Age related weakening of the muscles of the lower lid [more common] leads to an outward bowing of the lower lid. A normal lower lid sitting flush with the eyeball is required for the proper drainage of the tears which continuously flows over the eyeball with every blink. Flowing along the lower lid margin, the tears drain into a hole in the lower lid & from there, into the nose. So, when the lower lid moves away from the eyeball, there is an overflow of water, which doesn't go into the draining hole, called punctum. Constant watering from the eye affects a person's vision. This condition can be corrected surgically to solve the problem.

### B. Entropion

This is again caused by age related changes in the tendons, muscles and septae that form the lids, resulting in an inward turning of the lower lid [more common than upper], which results in the lashes touching the cornea & conjunctiva. This can cause irritation, pricking etc. followed by reflex watering. Long standing cases may cause damage to cornea, thus can affect vision. This again needs surgical correction. This is not a condition to be neglected as watering, pricking sensation or redness are common to most of the eye problems, it is common for people to confuse this problem to be due to allergy etc. & procrastinate seeing a doctor. But, here again, earlier, the better.

## **DRY EYE**

The tears have a very important role to play in the functioning of the eyes. Whenever there is an inadequate amount or an improper functioning of the tears, it is called dry eyes. Very common in the elderly, especially post-menopausal women, & people with increased screen time. Causes dry feeling, burning pricking, discomfort, fluctuating vision etc. What needs to be understood is that management is focused on correcting the factors affecting the abnormal function of tear film, like reducing screen time, avoiding evaporative conditions like ac, increased blinking during watching computer/ mobile / TV, etc. Tear substitute eye drops, which mimic the tears can be used or, as a last effort, punctum plugs

to block the outflow of tears can be tried. Proper understanding of the disease without fear of losing the eye is the right approach to face this. Only a few cases of dry eyes can be reversed. The rest must learn to live with it. One can comfortably live with dry eyes with the correct treatment.

## CATARACT

The crystalline lens is a structure within the eye, which helps to focus incoming light onto the retina to form an image of the objects that we see. Now, any opacity in this crystalline lens distorts or blocks light passing through it & leads to defective vision. This is cataract. If there is one thing that is inevitable with ageing, it's getting cataract. Luckily, it's also very easy to manage. Remedy is always surgical. Painless procedure is done & the defective crystalline lens is replaced by an intraocular lens. With various types of intraocular lenses available, cataract surgery is now aiming to convert your vision to one of a 20 years old. So, if one has cataract, be happy that the correct treatment will improve your vision.

## GLAUCOMA

It is the damage to the optic nerve with damage to the field of one's vision with an increase in the pressure within the eye. This is a silent thief of sight. The only way to catch the thief is regular annual eye examinations. Waiting for symptoms to develop or saying my vision is good, I need not go to a doctor are factors encouraging this thief of sight. With appropriate treatment that may be eye drops or surgery, the loss of vision can be halted. There is no way to recover the vision lost. The field of one's vision means that when one is looking ahead at an object of interest, we are also having a whole field of vision of all objects surrounding the central object. Since this field of vision is first lost in glaucoma, one cannot notice it. Because of the above 2 facts, here prevention is the only appropriate measure. Get your eyes tested annually and don't worry about glaucoma.

## DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

Nowhere else would I say that prevention is better than cure. If not treated early, this can cause permanent & debilitating loss of vision & hence a functional life. Duration of Diabetes, poor control, associated Hypertension, increased Cholesterol levels, & Smoking are associated with higher chance of Diabetic Retinopathy [DR]. In DR, there are two ways in which an eye is affected. In the

first type, new vessels develop which are fragile & hence bleed easily. With repeated bleeds there can be fibrosis with detachment of retina with loss of vision, ie, damage to the back of eye. This type needs lasers initially & may need surgery later on. In the second type, there is fluid collection in the central important part of the retina & this causes loss of vision. This is managed with repeated injections of medicines given to the eye. Strict control of BP, cholesterol & sugar levels, regular [frequency as directed by the doctor] follow up with Eye Specialists & adhering to these two are a must to have the best chance of having functional fruitful vision.

#### AGE RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION [ARMD]

This is a degeneration (death of cells) of the central part of retina [macula] responsible for most of our vision. DR and ARMD are the most common cause of irreversible visual loss. Risk factors being increasing age, smoking, high fat intake, etc. Once ARMD sets in, in the initial dry type of ARMD, supplements of vitamins & minerals are likely to delay progression to the second stage. Green leafy vegetables, fruits like orange are rich in lutein and zeaxanthin and should be consumed on a regular basis. Once the disease progresses to the wet form, injections given into the eye form the baseline of treatment. These need to be repeated for life many a times, hence this is a costly affair. Health insurance helps in such cases.

#### SUMMARY

DR, ARMD, Glaucoma, & Cataract are the major vision threatening diseases affecting the elderly, and are unfortunately not diseases that can be prevented. The only safeguard apart from healthy lifestyles & diet, is regular checkup with your ophthalmologist, annually. If there is anything that I would like the readers to take home from this, it would be that there is no supplement to regular checkup with an ophthalmologist before the onset of symptoms. Another word would be that since the treatment of some of these are long & expensive, having a health insurance policy that covers these would definitely help.

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