Eye-care myths: Busted? Or not?

By Graham Anderson

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Your eyes are windows to the world, but many of us aren't blessed with 20/20 vision. Even so, you can take your blinkers off when it comes to eye-care, especially during September, Eye-care Awareness Month.

These are some of the myths about eye-care:

Reading in dim light is bad for you

Although reading in dim light can cause eye fatigue, it doesn't permanently damage your vision. If you do experience eye fatigue, simply stop doing whatever it was that caused it and it will go away.

Sitting close to the television can harm your eyes

Unless you own a television from the '60s, your eyes are at no risk from radiation being emitted by a television screen. Children in particular have a shorter focal distance than adults do, so they won't strain their eyes by sitting too close.

Eat carrots to see better

Although carrots contain Vitamin A, which helps to protect the surface of the eye or cornea, any balanced diet should contain enough of this vitamin to keep your eyes working without you having to eat like a rabbit.

If you wear glasses, you get dependent on them

Glasses are the solution for blurred vision; they do not cause a deterioration of eyesight. Of course, once you start wearing glasses and get used to seeing clearly, you will find that you want to wear your glasses more often. This isn't dependency, it is simply enjoying good, clear vision.

Nothing can be done to prevent vision loss

If you experience any symptoms like blurred vision, eye pain, flashes of light or floating objects in your vision, see a doctor. Many causes of sight loss can be treated if they are detected early enough.

People with bad eyesight shouldn't wear out their eyes by doing detailed work

Reading the fine-print or focusing on fine detail doesn't damage already weak eyes. The eye is not a muscle - it is more like a camera, and will not wear out sooner just because it's photographing intricate detail.

Working at a computer damages your eyes

Most of the eye discomfort you feel after working at a computer is as a result of the fact that you blink less and your eyes are dry. If you can't take a regular break from looking at the screen, use moistening eyedrops - not antihistamine ones! Anti-glare screens for your monitor can also help reduce discomfort, but result in a slightly blurred image, which itself can cause eye strain.

Of course, there are many things that you can do to look after your eyes and preserve your vision.

Wear UV protective sunglasses

Exposure to UV rays can harm your eyes so protecting them from the sun can prevent loss of eyesight. It is important to buy polarized lenses, not simply darker ones. Also, wear wraparound lenses to protect against UV rays from the sides.

Wear protective eyewear if necessary

If you work with chemicals or airborne particles, wear goggles or other protective eyewear. The worst harm that you can do to your eyes is from external damage - and there's no way to replace an eye once it's been harmed.

Avoid harsh contrasts in light

Try to locate your desk so that windows are to the side rather than directly behind or in front of your computer. The light from overhead fluorescent lights is also typically two to five times brighter than it should be, which causes eye fatigue. If at all possible, try to work with natural light or incandescent light bulbs rather than fluorescent lights.

Visit an eye specialist regularly

Even if your vision is fine, it's a good idea to visit your optometrist regularly. This will help you to prevent any major problems and will track not just your vision but the health of your eyes as well over the years, as some deterioration can be picked up only by tracking the change in the eye function. Remember that problems caught early can often be arrested, so make sure that you budget for eye-care or use the eye-care allocation in your medical aid.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Graham Anderson is the principal officer of Profmed.

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