

The health secrets in YOUR EYES

They're not just a window into your soul – they can reveal insights into your wellbeing. Eye surgeon Romesh Angunawela reveals what your eyes tell you about your health



Stress or fatigue

A twitch on the lid above or below the eye, called myokymia, is usually a sign of stress or fatigue. A lack of sleep will also often leave eyes looking puffy and red. There's a simple solution – get more rest!

Jaundice

A yellowing of the whites of your eyes is a warning sign that should not be ignored. The most common cause is jaundice, a build-up of bilirubin, the yellow substance formed when red blood cells are broken down. If your liver can't filter the cells properly, the bilirubin levels rise, turning your eyes and skin yellow. This, in turn, is usually a sign of serious health issues such as hepatitis, liver disease or something blocking the bile ducts, such as gallstones or cancer.

High cholesterol

A white ring around the iris is a common sign of ageing but can also indicate high cholesterol and triglyceride levels, increasing your risk of heart attack or stroke. Get it checked by an optician.

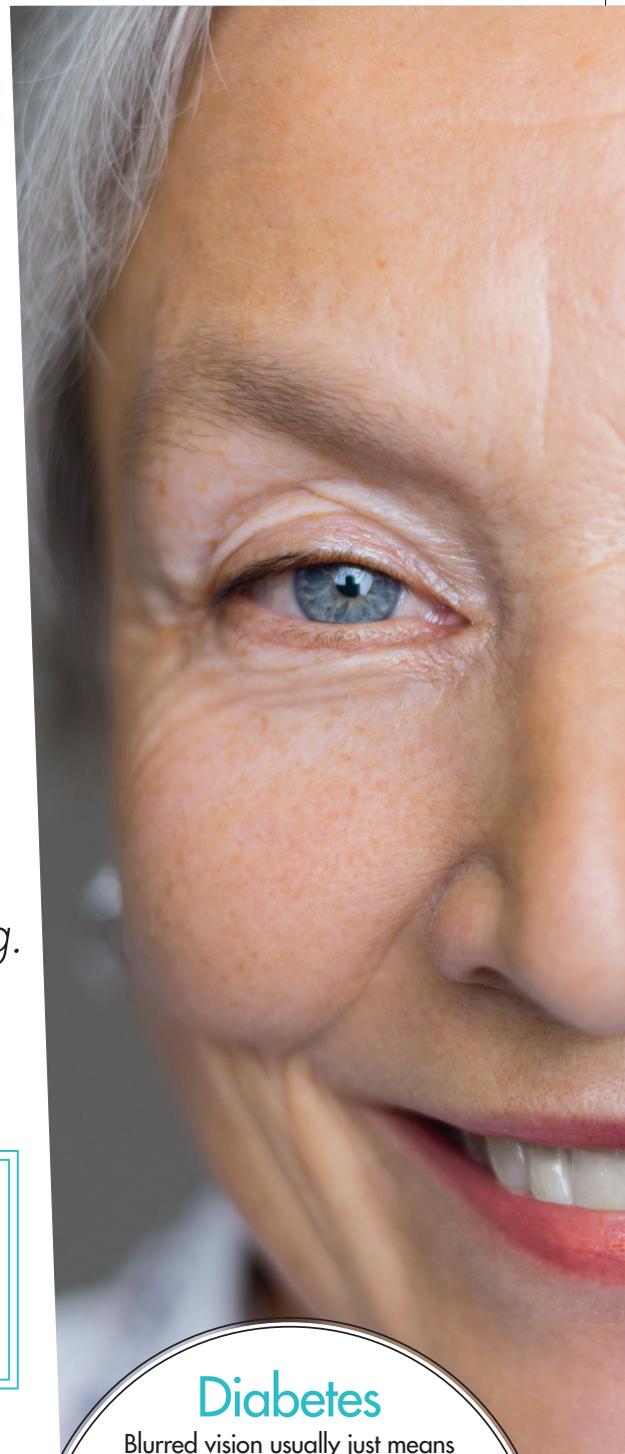


Contact lens problems

Over-wearing contact lenses can deprive the cornea of oxygen and result in blood vessels growing onto it. Early diagnosis is important. The most common cause of corneal infection is also contact lens wear, and good contact lens habits are essential to avoid serious problems.

Diabetes

Blurred vision usually just means you need glasses, but it can also be a sign of medical problems with the eye such as cataracts or macular degeneration, or more serious health issues such as diabetes. Even if you haven't noticed any change to your vision, an ophthalmologist will be able to detect diabetes from retinal irregularities such as tiny haemorrhages or fat deposits during a regular eye test.





Sun damage

Yellow brown patches on the whites of your eyes called pinguecula, or thicker growths called pterygium, are usually caused by overexposure to the sun's UV rays. While most are harmless, they can cause irritation and a small number of them are pre-cancerous, so always wear sunglasses with good UVA and UVB protection.

High blood pressure

High blood pressure damages blood vessels in your retina, called hypertensive retinopathy. While these effects are not visible to the naked eye, an ophthalmologist will be able to flag this damage during an eye test.

Retinal tearing or detachment

Little specks moving across your field of vision – known as eye floaters – are pretty common, but should not be ignored if new. A sudden increase in the number of floaters can be a sign of retinal tear or detachment.

Autoimmune disease

Droopy eyelids on both eyes can be a sign of myasthenia gravis, an autoimmune disease that causes muscle weakening. Autoimmune diseases can cause dry eye conditions, such as Sjögren's syndrome, and in their most severe form can actually be deadly so always get droopy eyelids checked. If they're combined with different-sized pupils in both eyes, it can be a warning sign of an aneurysm – swelling of a blood vessel – or a tumour in the neck.

Overactive thyroid

Bulging or protruding eyeballs, known as exophthalmos, is often a sign of an overactive thyroid, also called Graves' disease, which carries many health risks, so should be treated as quickly as possible.

Allergies

People who have asthma and eczema can also commonly have itchy, red, allergic eyes. Skin around the eye can also develop eczema and become flaky and sore. Speak to your GP because appropriate treatments are available.



And remember...

Most health conditions picked up through your eyes can be treated swiftly and effectively. Have regular eye tests (at least every two years), and respond quickly to any changes in your eyes by seeing your doctor quickly and taking the recommended treatment and medication.

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