EYE-SPY secrets

From dryness to twitching, here's what your eyes really reveal about your health

GET CHECKED
Changes in your vision could mean anything (or nothing) so it's always best to get it looked at. Routine eye check-ups are recommended every two years.

When was the last time you really looked at yourself in a mirror? Forget spotting the odd wrinkle and annoying spot. Pause and take a good look at the two eyes staring back at you – they can give away a lot about your health and wellbeing. Their intricate network of blood vessels, nerves and tissues can reflect internal issues, shining a spotlight on a range of conditions, from high blood pressure or cholesterol to neurological disorders and nutritional deficiencies. Not sure what to look for? Our health experts are here to help.

Dryness

This is a little-known side effect of peri/menopause. 'The androgen hormone lowers, resulting in a decrease in oil which causes tears to evaporate faster,' explains nutritional scientist Toral Shah (wileysfinest.co.uk). This can lead to irritation, swelling and inflammation. In contrast, if your eyes are watery and dripping tears, this may be a symptom of dry-eye syndrome caused by oil glands becoming blocked and overflowing.

FIX IT
Increase omega-3 fatty acids in your diet (found in fish, flaxseed and chia seeds) to improve tear production. Some over-the-counter eye drops and lubricant gels may also relieve symptoms.

Red or bloodshot

If your whole eye turns red, it's most likely the result of a burst blood vessel. It can look alarming, says Dr Alexandra Moorhouse, GP at Wellsoon Private Healthcare (practiceplusgroup.com). 'I wouldn't ignore it – it can be a potential sign of high blood pressure.' Drinking too much alcohol can also cause blood vessels in the eye to swell, causing them to look red.

FIX IT
A rupture will usually resolve itself in about a week, with redness subsiding over a few days. Avoid aspirin or other blood-thinning medication, as it can make the bleeding worse. See your GP if you have a history of (or are concerned about) high blood pressure.

Pale red inner lids

This could signify anaemia (iron or B12 deficiency), which causes a lower than normal number of red blood cells. 'Anaemia can be present in middle-aged women due to heavy vaginal bleeding caused by peri/menopause, or as a result of being on hormone replacement therapy,' says Dr Moorhouse. Other nutritional deficiencies, such as vitamins A and B6 and copper, can lead to paleness of the inner eyelids, too.

FIX IT
Ask your GP for a blood test. Anaemia can be caused by an iron deficiency or lack of vitamin B12, so taking supplements and upping your intake of iron-rich foods (red meat, leafy greens, beans) can help.

Twitching

That really weird, fluttery feeling underneath your eyelid – like a miniature heartbeat – occurs when muscles in your eyelid spasm. 'Eyelid twitching is often harmless and temporary and is most commonly caused by stress or fatigue, but prolonged twitching may rarely be an early sign of conditions that affect the nervous system, like multiple sclerosis,' says Dr Deborah Lee (doctorfox.co.uk). If you have balance problems, blurred vision and numbness, visit your GP.

NEVER IGNORE
- Blurred or double vision
- Burning eyes
- Droopy eyelids
- Unusual eye pain
- Floaters with flashing lights

Excess gunk

The most common cause of this is conjunctivitis, which can often point to a viral illness, explains Dr Moorhouse. Other common causes are blocked tear ducts, allergies and dry-eye syndrome. 'A gritty feeling in the eyes can also be linked with the menopause,' she adds.

FIX IT
Avoid touching your eyes and practise good hygiene. Viral conjunctivitis usually clears up on its own in a few days, but if it persists, see a doctor as it might be bacterial, which can require antibiotic eye drops to clear it up. A cool compress can relieve pain.

White ring in the iris

'A white ring just inside the outer ring of the iris can be a sign of high cholesterol,' says Susan Blakeney of the College of Optometrists. The white or greyish ring is a build-up of fatty substances. In older adults, this is considered quite common, but it should always be checked out.

FIX IT
Get your blood cholesterol checked by your GP. You can help lower yours by maintaining a healthy weight, cutting out processed food, reducing saturated fats, quitting smoking and increasing exercise.

Your sight and what it's saying

FLOATERS
Usually harmless, but a sudden increase with flashing lights could indicate a retinal tear.

BLURRED VISION
Most commonly a symptom of age-related deterioration. More rarely a sign of type 2 diabetes or cataracts.

CLOUDY, HAZY VISION
Could be a possible indicator of cataracts.

WAVY OR DISTORTED VISION
Potential macular degeneration.

FLASHES OF LIGHT
This could mean a retinal tear. Also, a common symptom of migraine.

HALOS AROUND LIGHTS
May indicate potential glaucoma or corneal swelling.

DOUBLE VISION
Muscle problems in the eye. More rarely, it could be a sign of neurological problems, like stroke or multiple sclerosis.

PHOTOS (POSED BY MODELS): GETTY. IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT YOUR HEALTH, SEE YOUR GP. CONSULT YOUR GP OR MEDICAL EXPERT BEFORE TAKING NEW SUPPLEMENTS