

You can't spot eye disease.

Why eye health is important

Good eyesight is an important part of wellbeing and a significant factor in retaining independence and quality of life as we get older.

Contrary to popular belief, loss of vision does not need to be an accepted consequence of ageing. Vision can deteriorate for many reasons and, even when associated with the ageing process, many interventions are available.

The World Health Organization estimates that up to 80 per cent of blindness and serious visual loss around the world is avoidable through prevention or treatment¹.

Having your eyes tested for vision and general eye health can help identify problems early and prevent loss of eyesight.

How common are eye problems in Australia?

In Australia, it is estimated that 51 per cent of the population overall has at least one eye problem. This figure rises to 87 per cent of people aged over 45 years.²

Uncorrected refractive error (URE) is the most common cause of vision impairment in Australia. Refractive errors are optical defects that result in light not being properly focussed on the eye's retina. The most common are hypermetropia (long sightedness), myopia (short sightedness) astigmatism (uneven focus) and presbyopia (an age related problem with near focus).

The major causes of blindness and vision loss in Australia are the eye diseases:

- age-related macular degeneration
- glaucoma
- cataract
- diabetic retinopathy

The importance of early detection

There are often no symptoms in the early stages of eye disease, however if individuals wait until symptoms start to occur, loss of vision may be irreversible.

Correct early diagnosis, treatment and support can ensure eye sight is preserved. The signs of eye disease are hard to spot, so having your eyes tested is a simple and vital factor in maintaining healthy eyes.

¹ World Health Organisation (1997). Fact Sheet No 143: Blindness and Visual Disability Part II of VII: Major Causes Worldwide – February 1997.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2004. *Australia's Health 2004*. Canberra: AIHW

