

# Focus on Eye Care

*This article was written by Dr Potgieter for 8 Editions of the Record - September 22, 2012.*

## Good Vision

Vision is without doubt one of our most valuable senses. To enjoy good vision, the images we see must be sharp, in focus and undistorted. It is a critical part of our daily lives, especially when great demands are placed on our vision, such as during our years of study, our professional- and social lives and sport activities.

Poor vision has many possible causes, but in the final instance it means that the images we see are out of focus, "smeared", appear as "double vision" or parts of the image are simply missing. Because the brain tries to compensate for such problems, it places stress on the entire visual system which, in turn, can lead to headaches, lack of concentration and personal frustrations.

## Seven tips to care for your eyes

According to Dr Frik Potgieter, a local eye specialist at the Optimed Eye and Laser Clinic in Queenswood, we can all care for our eyes effectively by following seven basic guidelines:

1. Irrespective of whether the day is clear or not, wear good quality sunglasses to shield your eyes from the sun's damaging ultraviolet rays when you are outside. If possible, also wear a hat to shield your eyes from as much as possible of this dangerous radiation.

*Lengthy exposure to ultra violet radiation induces various eye problems, such as cataracts, pterigia and macular degeneration.*

*Sunglasses with polarised lenses help to reduce the sun's reflection off water- and road surfaces. For example, it causes less strain on the eyes when you are on the beach or when you are driving a vehicle with the sun in your line of sight.*

*Do not think that overcast conditions reduce ultra violet radiation! The radiation can even be more intense in cloudy conditions, because not only the direct rays reach our eyes and bodies, but also the reflected rays. You therefore receive a double dose of radiation!*

2. Do not read in bright sunlight on a veranda or the beach.

*It has the same negative consequences as pointed out above. Keep your head in the shade and, if you usually use reading glasses to read, get good quality sunglasses with built-in reading lenses, which is generally available from most reputable chemists today.*

3. Avoid the habit to rub your eyes.

*If you rub your eyes, it weakens the structural integrity of the cornea, which can contribute to a condition known as Keratoconus. This condition leads to an unstable focus mechanism, which will in time cause poor vision and may eventually even lead to a cornea transplant so that good vision can be restored. So the bottom line is: do not rub your eyes!*

4. Eat healthy and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

*The intake of anti-oxidants like vitamins A, C, D and E, and supplements like zinc, promotes good health, which in turn promotes good eyesight. Lutein and Zeaxanthin lowers the risk of macular degeneration and can help to slow down its progress if it is already present. These supplements are also found in green-leaf vegetables like spinach, tomatoes, oranges, nuts, dairy products, eggs etc. Omega 3 oils also help for the treatment of dry eyes.*

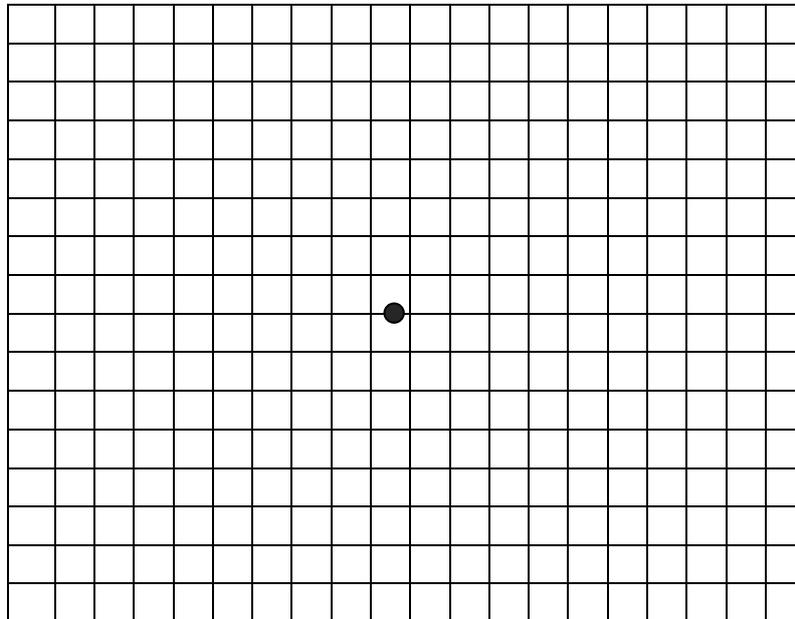
*The smoking habit also plays a role in visual degeneration. For many health-related reasons it is, therefore, advisable to kick this habit.*

5. The following “Amsler grid” is a simple, yet very useful aid to assess your vision.

*You can apply this test yourself to monitor the central vision and sharp-vision area of the retina. With one eye closed (and reading glasses if applicable), look at the central spot.*

*Use good lighting and hold the paper at normal reading distance. Without moving the eye, note if you can see all the lines all the way to the edges of the grid and whether any of those lines are bent or distorted.*

*Now test the other eye in the same manner. If you observe any abnormalities, immediately contact an eye specialist for an eye examination.*



6. Use eye protection when you work around the house and practice sport.

*This is especially applicable when you mow the lawn or when you use power tools such as a grindstone or circular saw. A loose stone or scraps of material flying off the grindstone or saw can cause severe damage to one or both your eyes.*

*The same applies to any sport that uses hard balls, sticks, clubs or racquets, such as squash, golf and cricket. Many people today have permanently-damaged eyesight because they did not take any safety precautions.*

7. Visit your optometrist or, if a more in-depth examination is required, your eye specialist to have your eyes examined for hidden or latent problems.

*Even if you think that you do not have any eye problems, a regular visit is not only desirable, but often essential. For example, the eye condition known as glaucoma is fairly common, but does not display any visible symptoms in its early stages of development. Only an examination with specialised diagnostic equipment can reveal this condition. If left untreated, glaucoma can lead to permanent loss of vision. Since glaucoma mostly appears after the age of forty, visit an eye specialist once per year to have the pressure in your eyes checked.*

*Also visit your eye specialist regularly if you have any systemic diseases, such as diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. Various eye problems, that can be treated or that has to be monitored, can be present without you knowing about them.*

*A regular examination will reveal the health of your eyes and will show whether you have actual or latent eye problems; what the best plan of action should be; whether you will be a good candidate for laser surgery or whether another treatment may be more appropriate.*