



Ageing eyes and falls



As you get older you are more likely to fall, and poor eyesight has been linked to falling. This fact sheet will explain what you can do to keep your eyes healthy, what you can do to reduce the chances of falling, and how you can get a free NHS sight test.

What happens as you get older?

It is normal for our eyes to change as we get older. Normal changes include losing the ability to focus on things that are close-up (presbyopia), finding that it takes longer to adapt to changing lighting conditions and finding that we need more light to see things.

As we get older we are also more likely to develop eye disease. The most common eye diseases in older people are cataracts, age-related macular degeneration and glaucoma.

For more information on any of these conditions, talk to your optometrist or visit www.lookafteryoureyes.org.

Who is more likely to fall?

There are several reasons why people fall over and not all are related to poor eyesight. You are most at risk of falling if you:

- are aged over 75
- have fallen before
- have Parkinson's disease, arthritis, diabetes, Meniere's disease or dementia
- are taking sedatives, antidepressants or more than four prescription medicines a day.

What you can do to reduce the chance of falling

1. Try to keep your eyes healthy.
2. Have good lighting. Energy saving bulbs are fine as long as you

position them correctly. We recommend having lamps close to where you need the light (for example, a lamp near the chair where you sit to read).

3. Make sure you turn the lights on at home when it is dark, so that you can see where you are going.
4. Make sure that your carpets are well-fitted and do not have trip hazards, such as creases, in them. If you have a rug that is on a slippery floor, make sure that it does not slip or move when you walk on it.
5. Wear suitable footwear when you are walking around, both at home and outside.
6. Having a good contrast between things can make them easier to see. For example, a dark toilet seat on a white toilet, or dark edges on steps or stairs.
7. If you are dazzled by the sunshine when you are out, wear sunglasses that absorb the UV light or a hat with a brim to shield you from the sunlight.

8. If your optometrist has told you that you should wear glasses for distance (watching television, walking about and so on) you should keep them on when you are walking outside your home.
9. If you wear bifocals or varifocals, you may be more likely to fall, even if you are used to them. If you take part in regular outdoor activities, it may be a good idea to have a pair of distance glasses to wear outdoors or when you are in unfamiliar places, or to take your glasses off if your distance prescription is not very strong. Your optometrist will be able to advise you about this.

What your optometrist can do to reduce the chance of you falling

If you have recently had a big change to your prescription for glasses, ask your optometrist whether they can change the strength of your glasses gradually to make it easier for you to get used to your new prescription. You should only wear your new glasses at home until you are used to them.

How to get a free NHS sight test and where to go for more information

Everyone over the age of 60 is entitled to a free NHS sight test. Most optometrists will provide this service, and we recommend that you look for an optometrist who is a member or a fellow of the College of Optometrists (look for the letters MCOptom or FCOptom after their name). You do not need to be registered with a particular practice, so just make an appointment when it is convenient. Most practices are open on Saturdays, and some on Sundays and in the evenings.

If you have any concerns about the health of your eyes, please visit your local optometrist. Optometrists are the eye-health specialists on the high street. An eye examination is a vital health check and should be part of everyone's normal health care.

Find your local optometrist, and more information on ageing eyes and falls, on ***www.lookafteryoureyes.org***