



Have perfect vision? You still need to get a checkup.

# 8 Mistakes That Mess with Your Eyes

Quit these habits so you can see clearly, now and in the future.

By **AMANDA MACMILLAN**

**YOU RELY ON YOUR EYES** from the second you wake up to the moment you turn off the lights at night. But are you really giving them the TLC they deserve? We talked to eye docs about patients' biggest bloopers. Here's what *not* to do if you want your vision to stay healthy well into your golden years.

## 1. Sleeping in your contacts

For the enzymes and antibodies on the surface

of your eyes to work against germs, they need oxygen. But because your eyes have a reduced supply under contacts (compounded by your eyes being closed), they're less able to fend off infection. Several types of contacts are FDA-approved for overnight wear, but even those can be risky, says Deeba Chaudri, OD, an optometrist in New York City. In fact, one study found that the risk of a corneal ulcer is 10 to 15 times greater in

extended-wear contact lens users than those who wear their contacts only during the day.

## 2. Sleeping in your makeup

Hitting the sack without washing your face can do more than leave mascara stains on your pillow; it can also clog the glands around your eyes and result in irritated skin, pimples, and even sties—painful, raised bumps that can appear on or around the eyelids.

## 3. Not getting regular eye exams

"A lot of first-time patients tell me, 'I haven't had an eye exam in 12 years, because my vision was 20/20 the last time I was checked,'" says Chaudri. But vision isn't the most important reason to see an eye doc regularly. "It's about getting your overall eye health checked out," she explains. "There are no pain receptors behind the eye, so if you have a broken blood vessel back there, you might not know until it starts to interfere with your vision, or worse."

## 4. Using expired solution, lenses, or drops

There's nothing wrong with saving a slightly-past-its-prime bottle of contact solution, right? Actually, there could be. "These solutions have cleansers that kill bacteria on your lenses, so you want to make sure all those ingredients are still doing their job," says Chaudri. The same goes for the lenses themselves, which sit in a sterile solution that can break down over time. Artificial tears and Rx drops also have expiration dates that you shouldn't ignore.

## 5. Touching and rubbing your eyes

"Sometimes your eyes itch and you have to rub, but it's

best to keep the lid closed and touch only the outside of the eye," says Chaudri. Your eyes are protected by mucous membranes—moist tissue that can easily collect dirt and germs—so they're a great place for bacteria to grow. "If you shake someone's hand and then rub your eyes, you're transmitting those germs, and there's a good chance you can catch whatever cold he's got," says Chaudri. Another reason to keep your hands off: Rubbing too hard can lead to broken blood vessels and inflammation.

## 6. Skipping eye protection

"I once had a patient in terrible pain after a tennis ball hit her straight in the eye," recalls Anne

Sumers, MD, a retired ophthalmologist in Ridgewood, New Jersey. "It took the surface of her cornea off." According to the National Eye Institute, 90 percent of sports-related eye injuries could be prevented by wearing impact-resistant protective eyewear. It's a good idea to shield your eyes while working in the yard, too. "I've had patients who got hurt while gardening because their partner was simultaneously weed whacking, which can throw pebbles or fragments into the air," says Dr. Sumers.

## 7. Applying eyeliner to your waterline

Even though makeup artists sometimes suggest putting eyeliner on the inside of the lower lash line, it's actually a risky move. "When you put liner inside your eye, you're mixing it with your tears," explains Chaudri. If you're wearing contacts, your lenses then get coated in tiny makeup particles, which can deprive your eyes of oxygen. And even if you're not wearing contacts, those makeup particles can carry germs that may cause infection. Liquid

liners can be especially dangerous, she adds, since the applicator tip may sit in a tube that can harbor bacteria. Soft pencils are safer, but Chaudri still recommends keeping eye makeup outside the rim.

## WHAT'S THAT ITCH?

If your eyes are red and watery as well as itchy, you can probably blame allergic conjunctivitis—a reaction to irritants like mold, dust, pet dander, or pollen. The symptoms can wax and wane, says Michigan-based ophthalmologist Steven Shanbom, MD. When they crop up, get away from the trigger if possible, and use OTC antihistamines (oral or drops) or ask your doc about Rx drops. If you wear extended-wear contacts, it may help to switch to dailies: "Contacts build up protein deposits, and some people can become allergic to that," says Dr. Shanbom.

Eyes more gritty than itchy? That could mean dry eye, a condition in which your eyes don't get enough moisture. Try using artificial tears. Severe cases may require Rx drops. But whatever you do, don't ignore dry eye: Serious cases left untreated can lead to scarring and vision loss.

—Anthea Levi

Thumbs-up to hiding behind shades—the bigger, the better.



EYE EXAM, MICHELLE DEL GUERCIO/GETTY IMAGES

WOMAN, COMPASSIONATE EYE FOUNDATION/THOMAS NORTHGUT/GETTY IMAGES

## 8. Not wearing sunglasses year-round

"A lot of people think sunglasses are only for the summer, or that they're only for fashion purposes," says Chaudri. "But wearing them in the winter can be even more important, because the sun reflects off the snow." Failing to wear proper UV protection can result in corneal burns, skin cancer on the eyelids, and visible spots on the whites of the eyes. Make sure your glasses provide 100 percent protection against UVA and UVB rays, advises Chaudri, and wear them whenever you're outside.