

Health & Healing®

YOUR DEFINITIVE GUIDE TO WELLNESS MEDICINE



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A Close Look at Common Eye Problems

Aristotle placed sight at the top of the hierarchy of the senses. Plato called vision “humanity’s greatest gift,” and Leonardo da Vinci described the eyes as “the window of the soul.”

Which of our senses deserves top billing is debatable, but survey respondents consistently rank eyesight as the one they would most regret losing. With that in mind, let’s look at common eye problems and what can be done to prevent, retard, and reverse them.

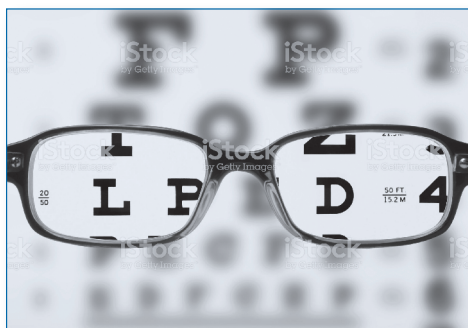
Twitches, Styes...

A twitch in your eyelid can drive you crazy, but take heart. These annoying muscle spasms, which are often related to stress, excessive caffeine, or fatigue, usually go away within days. Treatment is rarely required, but supplemental magnesium (400–500 mg) may tone down involuntary muscle contractions.

Eye compresses help as well. Warm, moist washcloths are often recommended, but they cool down after a couple of minutes. Hydrating eye masks, which are sold in drugstores and online, retain heat much longer. An inexpensive option is a small baked potato or hard-boiled egg, cooled to a comfortable temperature, wrapped in a clean damp cloth, and held over the affected area. (To reuse, reheat the potato in a microwave or the egg in hot water.) Just make sure you don’t put too much heat or pressure on the eye.

Compresses are also great for styes (infections in an eyelash follicle or oil gland) and chalazions

(blocked oil glands). These bumps on the eyelid can be quite painful and unattractive, but they too generally clear up without treatment, although chalazions may take several weeks. To speed things along, use warm compresses for 10–15 minutes three or four times a day. With all these conditions, be patient and give them some time to heal, but if they persist or worsen, consult a doctor.



...And Dry or Watery Eyes

If your eyes feel gritty, itchy, and dry, you may have keratoconjunctivitis sicca. That’s the medical term for dry eyes, and it’s one of most common reasons people consult eye doctors. Artificial tears are worth a try, but regular eye drops don’t cut it—and

the preservatives in multi-dose products may make matters worse. That’s because dry eyes are not just about the quantity of tears but also their quality.

Tears are composed of water to moisturize the eyes, mucus to spread tears over the eye’s surface, and oil to prevent rapid evaporation. Dry eyes are often due to blockage of the oil-producing meibomian glands that line the edges of the eyelids, which allows the tears to dry up too quickly. Warm compresses and gentle cleansing and massaging of the eyelids with diluted baby shampoo or commercial eyelid scrubs once or twice a day help open these glands.

Inflammation is another factor. A 2019 meta-analysis of 17 clinical trials involving 3,363 patients concluded that omega-3 fatty acids significantly

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improved dry eye symptoms. Wind, heating, air conditioning, and staring at a computer can also dry out your eyes. A number of medications including antihistamines, diuretics, antidepressants, and estrogen are linked with dry eyes as well.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is excessive tearing (epiphora). Hay fever and other allergies, irritants like onions and smoke, viral or bacterial conjunctivitis (pink eye), and eyelid issues are obvious culprits for “leaky” eyes. Another common cause, which can be treated by a physician, is blockage of the tiny ducts that drain tears into your nose. Finally—and counterintuitively—watery eyes often go hand-in-hand with dry eye syndrome and may respond to the same treatments.

Outlook for Cataracts and Glaucoma

Nearly 4 million Americans per year have cataract surgery to replace damaged, cloudy lenses with clear artificial ones. I have no beef with this surgery. It has a long track record of safety and efficacy and can even fix other vision problems, provided you pay extra for corrective intraocular lenses. But why not do what you can to prevent cataracts?

Sunglasses, hats, and an antioxidant-rich diet and supplements provide some protection, since oxidative damage from UV radiation is a primary factor in cataract formation. Glycation, which occurs when sugars bind to and damage proteins, also clouds the lenses. This is particularly problematic in diabetics, who develop cataracts much earlier than average—yet another reason to get a handle on blood sugar. Eye drops containing N-acetyl-carnosine, which inhibits glycation, have also been shown to slow cataract formation. (Life Extension’s Brite Eyes is a good brand.)

A much less common but more serious problem is glaucoma, a group of diseases that damage the

optic nerve, usually due to high pressures in the eye. The most important thing you need to know about glaucoma is that early-stage disease has no symptoms, but without treatment vision will slowly deteriorate. Therefore, periodic checkups are essential, especially if you have a family history of glaucoma. You also need to know about Mirtogenol, a Pycnogenol/bilberry supplement. Studies show that when patients with glaucoma used Mirtogenol (120 mg per day) alone or with prescription eye drops, circulation in the eyes and intraocular pressures improved.

Leading Causes of Vision loss

The number-one cause of vision loss in people over age 60 is age-related macular degeneration (AMD). The macula is a small, yellowish area in the back of the eye that is responsible for central vision. AMD damages the macula, resulting in blank, blurry, or distorted central, straight-ahead vision. Millions of older Americans have AMD, and every year about 250,000 of them develop the most serious “wet” form, marked by excessive blood vessel growth and leakage. AMD interferes with reading, writing, driving, and even recognizing faces, and it often leads to reclusiveness and loss of independence. I know because my dad had AMD, and it prevented him from doing many of the activities he enjoyed.

In younger adults, the leading cause is diabetic retinopathy. Chronically elevated blood sugar causes blood vessels in the retina to swell, leak, and eventually lose their ability to transport blood. This triggers the release of growth factors that stimulate the proliferation of new blood vessels that damage the retina. In the worst cases, fluid builds up in the macula, resulting in diabetic macular edema and loss of central vision.

Drugs developed in the past 15 years are a game changer for AMD and diabetic retinopathy. Vascular

DR.WHITAKERS

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author of 14 health books including: *The Mini-Fast Diet*, *The Whitaker Wellness Weight Loss Program*, *Reversing Hypertension*, *Shed 10 Years in 10 Weeks*, *The Pain Relief Breakthrough*, *Reversing Heart Disease*, *Reversing Diabetes*, and *Dr. Whitaker's Guide to Natural Healing*.

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endothelial growth factor (VEGF) is a protein that stimulates the growth of abnormal blood vessels in both conditions. VEGF inhibitors such as Avastin, Lucentis, and Eylea injected into the eyes block VEGF, which stops disease progression and usually improves vision.

Another breakthrough is the recognition of nutrition's role in eye diseases. The landmark Age-Related Eye Disease Studies (AREDS and AREDS2) found that supplements containing lutein, zeaxanthin, vitamins C and E, zinc, and copper lowered the likelihood of developing advanced AMD by 25 percent and slowed vision loss. Although the research is less robust for diabetic eye disease, studies suggest that these nutrients—along with others such as magnesium, vitamin A, and B vitamins that are often depleted in diabetics—enhance eye health and help stave off retinopathy.

Short-Arm Syndrome

Given my family history—AMD has a very strong genetic link—I've been taking the AREDS2

nutrients plus a potent multivitamin and other supportive supplements for decades, and I credit this with the fact that I have only one vision problem: short-arm syndrome (presbyopia). As we age, the lenses of the eyes become stiffer and less flexible, which makes focusing less efficient and worsens near vision for almost everyone over age 40. Even though I have 20/20 distance vision, I keep reading glasses handy because my arms aren't long enough to read small print without them.

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All-Around Protection for Your Eyes

Adopt a Healthy Lifestyle. Regular exercise is linked with a reduced risk of cataracts, glaucoma, and AMD, and a long-term 2019 European study found that a Mediterranean diet was associated with a 41 percent lower risk of advanced AMD. Leafy greens, bright orange-yellow produce, eggs, fish, berries, and citrus are particularly protective. Spending time outdoors is also important, especially for children, as it has been shown to reduce risk of myopia (nearsightedness).

Control Your Blood Sugar. Diabetes more than doubles risk of cataracts and glaucoma, and nearly half of diabetics have some degree of retinopathy. Keep your blood sugar under control with weight loss, a whole foods/low-carb diet, regular exercise, berberine 1,000–1,500 mg, cinnamon 1,000 mg, and chromium 400 mcg, taken daily in divided doses.

Protect Your Eyes Indoors and Out. Wear sunglasses and a wide-brimmed hat when you're outside, and avoid excessive indoor exposure to blue light, a high-energy wavelength of light that has adverse effects on the eyes. This is challenging because LED lights, compact fluorescent bulbs, computers, smartphones, tablets, and other digital devices all emit blue light. Limit screen time if possible—and remember to blink! Hold your devices 16–18 inches from your eyes, and

turn on blue light-blocking features, especially before bedtime, as blue light suppresses melatonin production and may interfere with sleep. And by all means, take supplements that absorb blue light.

Take Protective Supplements. The supplements used in AREDS2 contained vitamin C 500 mg, vitamin E 400 IU, zinc 80 mg, copper 2 mg, lutein 10 mg, and zeaxanthin 2 mg. Lutein and zeaxanthin are particularly important because in addition to preventing oxidative damage, they absorb blue light and increase the density of the protective macular pigment. Higher doses of lutein 20–40 mg and zeaxanthin 4–8 mg may offer even greater protection—and not only for degenerative eye diseases. These supplements have also been shown to reduce eye strain, glare sensitivity, and light/dark adaptation. I also recommend a daily multivitamin, fish oil 1,000–2,000 mg EPA/DHA, and other supportive nutrients such as bilberry 300 mg and taurine 600 mg.

Get Regular Checkups. Periodic visits to an eye doctor are a good idea, especially as you get older or if you have diabetes or a family history of AMD or glaucoma. Cloudy or blurred vision, fading colors, glare, halos, worsening night vision, and requirements for brighter light merit a visit, and any sudden changes should be checked out promptly.

Dear Dr. Whitaker

Q My mother always swore by cod liver oil, and I have used it off and on as an adult. Yet you never mention it when you write about fish oil. I would like to know why. — June H., Oklahoma

A Cod liver oil is a good source of beneficial omega-3 fatty acids, with levels of EPA and DHA similar to those of other fish oil supplements. However, it is also naturally rich in vitamin A and vitamin D. That's not a bad thing, but I recommend relatively high doses of EPA/DHA: 900–1,000 mg total for daily use and considerably more for inflammatory disorders, depression, cardiovascular disease, dry eyes, and other conditions. To get these amounts from cod liver oil could bump up intake of retinol (preformed vitamin A, the kind in cod liver oil) to potentially excessive levels, which can have adverse effects on the liver, bones, and nervous system, and, in pregnant women, increase risk of birth defects. That's why I don't recommend cod liver oil across the board—and why I use the nontoxic vitamin A precursor beta-carotene in my supplements. Examine cod liver oil labels carefully, as concentrations of EPA/DHA and vitamin A vary. Although higher-dose preformed vitamin A has some therapeutic uses, I do not recommend exceeding the tolerable upper intake level (UL) of 3,000 mcg (10,000 IU) on a regular basis.

Q I recently saw a nutritionist who wants me to do a hair analysis test. She said it would reveal

nutritional deficiencies and toxic exposures and diagnose some diseases. What is your take? — G.M., Arizona

A We never used hair analysis at Whitaker Wellness to determine nutrient levels because blood tests are more reliable. Hair analysis does provide insight into heavy metal exposure as well as illicit drug use, and recent research suggests it is an accurate gauge of long-term levels of the stress hormone cortisol. As for diagnosing disease, I wouldn't depend on hair analysis but recommend consulting a nutrition-minded physician.

Q I just found out I have mitral valve prolapse. Are there supplements that can help? — S.D., via phone

A Mitral valve prolapse (MVP) occurs when the mitral valve, which separates the left upper and lower chambers of the heart, doesn't close properly. The most common heart valve abnormality, MVP is usually a benign condition that requires no treatment. I know of no supplements that specifically target MVP, but I do recommend nutrients that support overall cardiovascular health such as antioxidants, magnesium, B vitamins, coenzyme Q10, and fish oil. Be aware that MVP may progress to mitral valve regurgitation, a potentially serious condition in which blood flows backwards during contractions. This can cause fatigue, shortness of breath, arrhythmias, and heart failure and may require medications or surgery to repair or replace the valve.

 Read more at drwhitaker.com, and send your own questions to drwhitakerquestions@drwhitaker.com.

New Online: Hormones and Diabetes

Women's risk of developing diabetes increases dramatically after menopause. Is it simply age or do female hormones, which sharply decline at menopause, play a role? Research suggests they do. A 2018 study involving nearly 200,000 women found that those who went through menopause before age 40 were 50 percent more likely to develop diabetes; before age 45, risk was 15 percent higher.

So can hormone replacement therapy (HRT) minimize this risk? In a *JAMA* review of 18 clinical trials, researchers from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that HRT significantly reduced risk of diabetes. Pointing out potential harms such as increased risk of cardiovascular events, they didn't go so far as to recommend HRT. However, the bulk of the research concludes that when HRT is used for a few years at the beginning of menopause and is not started more than 10 years after menopause, benefits outweigh risks. I heartily endorse HRT with bioidentical estrogen (estradiol) and natural progesterone; synthetic progesterone (progestins) and horse estrogen should be avoided. Men, testosterone replacement also improves insulin sensitivity and body composition (fat/lean muscle ratio), especially in overweight men with suboptimal testosterone levels—who are at significant risk of diabetes. To learn more, visit drwhitaker.com.



Works for Me...

► **Sore Feet** *I have had more than my share of foot problems, including a diagnosis of plantar fasciitis. I have discovered that shoes truly do make a difference. If you are having problems and really want a fit for your foot type, go to one of those stores like the Walking Company where they scan your feet and tell you what brands might work best. Brands that have worked for me (and do not look like chunky orthotics) include Mephisto and Abeo. My husband and brother, who are runners, like Hoka One One. Although I haven't tried them, they make women's shoes too. — Ann M., Florida*

► **Charley Horses** *I used to get bad charley horses in my feet, calves, and legs at night and would wake up in terrible pain. Then I tried Bioplasma, which is a homeopathic remedy that contains cell salts (minerals). When I woke up with severe cramping, I put a few tablets under my tongue, and the pain went*

away almost immediately and I could go back to sleep. So I started taking it before bedtime. This has really worked for me. — Constance, California

► **Nothing to Cure** *I do not have an extraordinary story. My wife and I eat healthy with very little sugar and minimal bread and pasta. I drink shakes—kale, spinach, berries, apple cider vinegar, turmeric, cayenne powder, celery, beet powder, protein powder, and almond milk or coconut water—nearly every day. I have upped my exercise, and I volunteer with the maintenance department at our church four hours every weekday and deliver Meals on Wheels once a week. I go to my chiropractor and get a massage once a month, and I take a regimen of vitamins and supplements. I have also been to your clinic in California. I am overweight and my wife is underweight, but even so, when I look around at my peers and hear their health stories, I am so thankful. People have asked me why I do all these things so regularly. What has it “cured” me of? The best answer I can give is that it hasn't “cured” me of a thing. There's nothing to cure! — Dennis D., Texas*



Do you have a Health Tip to share? We'd love to hear it! Send it to worksforme@drwhitaker.com.

Health Hack: What Expiration Dates Really Mean

Do you throw out food based on “expires on” or “use by” dates? Johns Hopkins researchers reported that 84 percent of people surveyed do. They assume these labels are regulated by law and mean that “outdated” food is no longer safe or, at best, of reduced quality. They're wrong. These dates are not required but are simply manufacturer suggestions. Nevertheless, they result in significant waste of perfectly good food and, perhaps not coincidentally, increased sales. If a food looks, smells, or tastes off, toss it. But don't depend on expiration dates to determine if food is edible.

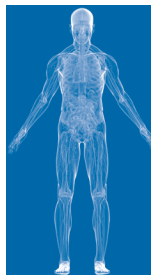
Monthly Health Quiz

Make No Bones About It: True or False?

- A) Astronauts lose 1–2% of their bone mass every month in space.
- B) Your funny bone is actually your ulnar nerve.
- C) Men have more ribs than women.
- D) Coffee depletes calcium and weakens the bones.

Answer:

A and B are true. C is false, although a small percentage of people have an extra 13th “cervical rib,” which may need to be surgically removed. Caffeine increases calcium excretion, but recent studies do not link this with bone loss. For optimal bone health, get 1,200 mg calcium, 2,000+ IU vitamin D, an array of other minerals, and weight-bearing exercise daily.



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Mother's Day Quote

“My mother was the most beautiful woman I ever saw. All I am I owe to my mother. I attribute my success in life to the moral, intellectual and physical education I received from her.”

— George Washington,
1st President of the United States, 1732–1799

No computer? Mail your question or health tip to *Health & Healing*, 6710-A Rockledge Dr., Ste. 500, Bethesda, MD 20817.

New Life for Old Remedies

Modern medicine has made incredible strides in trauma care, infection control, and treatment of acute strokes and heart attacks, and the technological innovations and pharmaceutical discoveries behind these advances deserve our highest praise. We also applaud recent breakthroughs in gene therapy, stem cells, artificial organs, and DNA-based personalized treatments, which are further changing the face of medicine.

That said, it's important we not lose sight of old therapies—some dating back thousands of years—that also save lives and improve our health.

Bloodletting and Leeches

The treatment of choice for one of the most common genetic diseases in the US is bloodletting—the same therapy used for thousands of years to treat everything from plague and seizures to fever and flatulence. In the Middle Ages, bloodletting was performed by barbers who nicked vessels in the arms and drained blood into basins. Today, it is called therapeutic phlebotomy, and in a process much like donating blood, it's used to treat hemochromatosis, an inherited disorder that causes a harmful buildup of iron in the body.

Another method of removing “bad blood” was leeching. These parasitic worms, which can suck 10 times their weight in blood, were placed on the skin over problematic areas to treat all manner of disease. Leeching made a comeback in the 1980s and is used today by surgeons who perform reconstructive microsurgeries for reattaching severed body parts and transplanting tissues. This involves suturing blood vessels that are so tiny and fragile that blood easily builds up, leading to potentially damaging venous congestion. Razor-sharp teeth, powerful suckers, and analgesic and anticoagulant compounds in their saliva allow leeches to painlessly cut through the skin and remove congested blood until the veins can function on their own.

Sugar, Honey, and Maggots

When a patient came to my clinic with a open, oozing wound, we packed it with sugar, bandaged it up, changed the dressing every day or two, and waited for it to heal. And it usually did. Sugar—or honey, which works in the same way but is messier—creates

a hyperosmotic, highly concentrated environment that inhibits microbial growth, draws fluid out of the wound, prevents swelling, and encourages natural debridement (the removal of dead or damaged tissue).

This therapy goes way back. A 3,600-year-old Egyptian papyrus gave instructions for treating wounds and burns with honey, and it was routinely used until the advent of antibiotics. I first read about sugar in the early 1980s in an article by Mississippi surgeon Richard Knutson, MD, who had used sugar dressings to successfully treat more than 600 patients with all kinds of wounds. Intrigued, I tried it on a patient with an infected,

non-healing ulcer who was scheduled for amputation but was desperate to save his leg. It worked, and I have since treated hundreds of diabetic ulcers, with predictably good results. Although few physicians have embraced sugar dressings, opting instead for painful debridement and antibiotics, honey has received some attention, and several recent studies have shown it to be an effective therapy for wound healing.

Maggots are another time-worn treatment for infected wounds. Taking a lesson from Mother Nature, traditional healers deliberately introduced fly maggots into wounds to eat away necrotic (dead) tissues and promote healing. Gross as it sounds, larval therapy or biotherapy, as it is now called, has multiple benefits. Not only do maggots debride wounds by feeding on necrotic tissue and leaving healthy tissue alone, but they also kill bacteria, which is why this has become an FDA-approved, though far from popular treatment for antibiotic-resistant infections.

From Yellow Soup to Fecal Transplant

Moving further into “gross” territory, let's talk about fecal transplants. Fourth century Chinese texts described ingestion of human feces as a miracle cure for severe diarrhea and food poisoning, and a compendium of traditional Chinese medicine therapies included “yellow soup” (suspensions of fresh, fermented, or infant feces) as a treatment for intestinal disorders. The magic, of course, is the microbiota—the beneficial gut bacteria in healthy feces.

Fast forward to 1958, when innovative physicians treated patients who were critically ill with intestinal



infections with enemas containing feces from healthy donors. They all rapidly recovered. Fecal transplants sat on the shelf until a 2013 controlled clinical trial found that 81 percent of patients with recurrent *C. difficile* infections were cured after one transplant, and a second treatment eradicated the infection in 90 percent.

Half a million Americans are infected with and 15,000 die from *C. difficile* infections every year. Fecal microbiota transplant is making inroads for *C. difficile*, with ongoing clinical trials, innovative delivery systems, and better access to healthy stool for transplant. Yet FDA regulatory hurdles—and squeamishness—have curtailed its use for Crohn's, inflammatory bowel disease, and other serious conditions that could benefit from this treatment.

The Poison Makes the Dose

Getting stung by a bee doesn't bring pain relief to mind, but Hippocrates included it as a treatment for joint pain. Apitherapists, who promote the therapeutic use of bee venom, say that multiple targeted bee stings are a godsend for people with arthritis, fibromyalgia, and multiple sclerosis. I'm not recommending this at the moment, but I am intrigued by research on bee and scorpion venom as cancer therapies.

Other sources of animal venom have already been harnessed by Big Pharma. For example, captopril,

an ACE inhibitor prescribed for hypertension, was inspired by the effects of Brazilian pit viper venom, which causes an instant drop in blood pressure. Byetta (exenatide), a drug used to treat type 2 diabetes, is a synthetic knockoff of a hormone in gila monster venom. And the saliva of vampire bats, which encourages blood vessel dilation and discourages clotting, holds promise as a therapy for hypertension, heart failure, and kidney disease.

Everything Old Is New Again

A handful of time-honored therapies have actually gone mainstream. Acupuncture, which has ancient roots in traditional Chinese medicine, is practiced by 35,000 licensed acupuncturists in the US and recommended by many conventional physicians. Fasting, massage, yoga, and meditation are also firmly entrenched. Probiotics sprang from the age-old recognition of the health benefits of yogurt and other fermented foods, and herbal therapies have a long and venerable lineage.

The lesson here is there's a lot to be learned from the old ways. We will always welcome the new, but let's acknowledge the value and wisdom of traditional healing and reexamine tried-and-true therapies with an open mind. After all, there's a reason they've endured for thousands of years.

The Healing Power of Plants

Herbalists, shamans, medicine men, and other traditional healers used plants as their primary therapies for treating and preventing disease. Ancient schools of medicine such as Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine have thousands of herbal formulations targeted for specific symptoms, diseases, and individual constitutions, and the majority of people in India and China still rely on them. Although herbal remedies are pooh-poohed by most US physicians, a significant percentage of Americans also use them.

Although North Americans and Europeans have gravitated towards purified, concentrated extracts of single or multiple herbs, they're still straight out of the herbalist's handbook. Turmeric for inflammation, berberine for diabetes, lutein for vision, valerian for sleep, cranberry for urinary issues, saw palmetto for prostate problems, St. John's wort for depression, bergamot for lipid lowering... I have used all these and many other age-old

remedies in my medical practice—often in place of drugs—with excellent results.

It may surprise you to learn that a quarter of all medications are directly or indirectly derived from plants. Morphine is extracted from opium poppies. Aspirin is a synthetic version of salicylate, a compound in willow bark, and digoxin, used to treat heart failure, came from foxglove. The antimalarial artemisinin was isolated from a traditional Chinese herbal remedy and the chemotherapy agent paclitaxel from Pacific yew trees.

Ethnopharmacology (the study of medicinal plants and indigenous remedies in various cultures) is an invaluable tool for new drug development. Tens of thousands of plant species have been screened for potential medicinal use, and an impressive number of medications have resulted from this research. Of course, the natural compounds are modified so they can be patented and produced in bulk, but they still have their roots in "primitive" medicine.

Innovations in Wellness Medicine

Hearing Aids May Reduce Cognitive Decline

Is there a relationship between hearing loss and cognitive decline? Indeed, there is. Multiple studies link hearing impairment with worsening cognitive function and increased risk of dementia. The more important question, however, is can treating hearing loss help stave off or reverse this decline—and preliminary research suggests it can. A small 2018 study found that six months after a group of hearing-impaired people began using hearing aids eight hours a day, 83 percent of them had improvements on tests of cognitive function. Another study, which evaluated 2,040 people in their 50s and older every two years for 18 years after they started wearing hearing aids, revealed that these devices slowed memory decline. The researchers concluded, “Providing hearing aids or other rehabilitative services for hearing impairment much earlier in the course of hearing impairment may stem the worldwide rise of dementia.”

Listen up. A quarter of men and women age 65 and older and half of those over 75 have a disabling degree of hearing impairment. If treating this condition—which is also associated with increased risk of falls, depression, social isolation, and hospitalization—has even an outside chance of helping sidestep memory loss, it’s time to get over the stigma of wearing hearing aids.

Avoiding Atrial Fibrillation Triggers

Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is a heart rhythm disturbance that affects nine percent of men and women over age 64. In this condition, the atria (the two upper chambers of the heart) quiver or beat irregularly, which allows blood to pool and potentially form clots. That’s why AFib is a major risk factor for stroke and other complications—and why patients are prescribed blood-thinners to reduce clot formation. Individuals with permanent or persistent AFib may require other medications to control heart rate and rhythm, cardioversion to restore normal rhythm, or ablation surgery. Others, however, have paroxysmal AFib: intermittent episodes lasting minutes to days that resolve without treatment.

To figure out what brings on these sporadic episodes, UC San Francisco researchers surveyed 1,295 patients with paroxysmal AFib. They discovered that three-quarters of them were aware of one or more triggers that provoked episodes. Alcohol was the most common, triggering AFib in 35 percent of patients, followed by caffeine, exercise, and lack of sleep (28, 23, and 21 percent, respectively). Everyone with paroxysmal AFib should be aware of these common triggers.

Did You Know?

- Diabetic women have a 40% higher risk of heart disease and a 25% higher risk of stroke than diabetic men.
- Study volunteers who drank 7 ounces of blueberry juice daily for a month had a 5 mmHg average drop in blood pressure.
- Fetuses begin hearing sounds outside the womb at 22–24 weeks, when they’re the size of a mango.
- Heavy smoking impairs vision by damaging blood vessels and areas of the brain that process vision.
- Physicists report that putting ice in your drinks helps prevent sloshing and spilling.
- High-oleic safflower, sunflower, and canola oils contain healthy monounsaturated fatty acids, but olive oil also has unique protective polyphenols.
- One in three Americans surveyed never interact with their neighbors or even know their names.
- The red/white stripes of barber poles originally signified their role as surgeons-bloodletters.
- Lutein and zeaxanthin support eye health and enhance neural efficiency and cognitive function in older people.
- Coenzyme Q10 and L-carnitine improve sperm quality in men struggling with infertility.
- Bowhead whales are the longest-living mammals at over 200 years, but sponges live for thousands of years.
- Only 23% of plastic water bottles sold in the US are recycled.

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