

What's Your Eye-Q?

by Jessica Cohn



Find out how much you know about healthy eyes.

Have you heard that you shouldn't cross your eyes because they can get stuck that way? In truth, that kind of thing happens only in cartoons. Yet the saying is repeated again and again.

What other eye-care "facts" are really fiction? Let's take a closer look at some common "eye-deas" about the eyes.

Eating carrots improves vision.

Fiction. The saying, however, is based on fact. Carrots have vitamin A, which helps keep vision strong.

"You never see any rabbits wearing glasses!" jokes Dr. Stuart R. Dankner. He's a pediatric *ophthalmologist* (a doctor who treats kids' eyes) and a spokesperson for the American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO). "Seriously, carrots contain high concentrations of carotene and vitamin A, both essential ingredients for the retina to remain healthy."

Milk and egg yolks, among other foods, have vitamin A too. The AAO says a balanced diet will give you all the vitamin A you need.

Don't look directly at the sun. You'll hurt your eyes.

Fact. Looking at the sun too long *can* cause temporary and permanent problems. Some people can't read afterward. Others see dark patches. Most people recover fully, according to the Moorfields Eye

Hospital in London. But 10 percent of patients continue to have problems, such as no longer being able to see license plate numbers twenty-five yards away. "Sunlight is not only responsible for [light sensitivity], but it can also damage the retina. It's always advisable to wear 100 percent UVA- and UVB-protected sunglasses all year round," says Dankner.

Sitting too close to the TV can damage eyes.

Fiction. It won't permanently damage your eyes, but it can cause some discomfort. You blink less often when watching TV, so your eyes can feel sensitive. The same thing can happen when you stare at the screen of a computer, cell phone, or MP3 player. Staring too long can even cause *double vision*, or seeing two images of one object. So look away often—at least every twenty minutes. Sitting too close to the TV—less than four feet away—also may be responsible for headaches and eyestrain.

Reading in dim light will ruin your eyes.

Fiction. "Reading in dim light does not ruin your eyesight," says Dankner. "It can, however, cause eyestrain and headaches." Good lighting can help prevent discomfort, so why not use it? And remember: If your eyes become red and tired, skip the eye drops. They are not meant for eyestrain. Using drops can lead to more redness over time. A special kind of eye drops called artificial tears may be used with a doctor's OK.

Wearing glasses or contacts weakens your eyes.

Fiction. Corrective lenses correct and sharpen eyesight, not weaken it. A corrective prescription usually becomes stronger as a person ages; perhaps that's how this wrong idea started. People noticed that eyeglass wearers needed stronger lenses *over time*.

However, contact lenses that are worn too long, or are slept in when they are not meant for overnight use, *can* cause eye infections. Check with your doctor about how to wear your contact lenses correctly.

Sweeteners make your eyes sensitive to light.

Fact. Some people report having sensitive eyes after eating foods with artificial sweeteners. Some medicines, such as diabetes drugs, can also cause sensitive eyes.

"It appears that sweeteners such as aspartame have been associated with allergic responses. Migraine headaches, dizziness, and light sensitivity are some of the side effects that may occur," says Dankner.

Be sure to tell your eye doctor about any changes in your vision.

Eye Know-How

Want healthy eyes? Keep these tips in mind.

1. Kids and teens should have an eye exam every two to four years, according to the University of Michigan Kellogg Eye Center.
2. Wear *ultraviolet*-absorbing eyewear when outside. (Ultraviolet rays from the sun can burn.)
3. When playing sports, using tools, or doing chores such as mowing the lawn, wear protective eyewear.
4. Reduce glare on your computer screen. Control light from windows with blinds and shades.
5. Adjust your computer screen. Place the center five to nine inches below your line of sight.
6. Use the "20/20/20 Rule" when staring at a screen. Take a twenty-second break every twenty minutes. Then focus your eyes at least twenty feet away.
7. If you feel eyestrain during an activity such as watching TV, add light or take a break.
8. Do not use eye drops without an eye doctor's OK.
9. If you wear contact lenses, clean them daily and replace them on the recommended schedule.
10. Eat a balanced diet to help keep your eyes moist and healthy.

Look Into Your Eyes!

Here are the parts of the eye.

Cornea: Helps the eye focus as light makes its way through

Iris: Colored part of the eye; helps control how much light goes through pupil

Pupil: Black circle in the center of the iris; lets light enter eye

Sclera: The protective white of the eye

Retina: Tissue that lines the inside of the eyeball

Lens: Focuses light rays onto the retina

Optic Nerve: Carries signals from retina to brain

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the article, what kind of thing only happens in cartoons?

- A. getting your eyes stuck from crossing them
- B. blinking less often when watching TV
- C. eating foods with artificial sweeteners
- D. not being able to read after looking at the sun too long

2. Which of the following is listed in the passage?

- A. foods that promote good eye health
- B. tips for maintaining healthy eyes
- C. reasons for visiting the ophthalmologist
- D. medicines that can cause sensitive eyes

3. Common ideas about the eyes may not always be true.

What evidence from the text supports this statement?

- A. The author suggests using the "20/20/20 Rule" when staring at the screen of a computer, cell phone, or MP3 player.
- B. The author discusses four popular ideas about the eyes that people often think are true but are actually false.
- C. The author lists the different parts of the eye as well as the role each part plays.
- D. The author includes a joke from Dr. Stuart R. Dankner, who says, "You never see any rabbits wearing glasses!"

4. Review the section under the header, "Find out how much you know about healthy eyes." After reading this section, how might the author want the reader to feel about "facts" he or she may have heard about eye care?

- A. accepting
- B. trusting
- C. skeptical
- D. indifferent

5. What is the main idea of this text?

- A. Some "facts" about eye care are not actually true.
- B. Eating a balanced diet helps keep eyes moist and healthy.
- C. Artificial tears may only be used with a doctor's OK.
- D. Kids and teens should have an eye exam every two to four years.

6. Read this sentence from the text.

"What other eye-care "facts" are really fiction?"

Why might the author have put the word "facts" in quotation marks?

- A. because it was a quote spoken by the author
- B. to emphasize that these statements are not true
- C. because the author is not sure of the meaning of the word
- D. to remind the reader to look up the definition of the word

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Wearing glasses does not weaken eyesight, _____ eyeglass wearers need stronger lenses over time.

- A. Although
- B. Because
- C. Since
- D. While

8. Staring too long at the screen of a computer, cell phone, or MP3 player can cause what?

9. List two fictions about eye health that people might believe to be true.

10. Explain how the fictions in the text about eye health may be related to something that is true.

Be sure to include at least two examples from the text to support your answer.