



What you should know about tobacco and your eyes



Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable deaths in the world.¹

Smoking tobacco can not only cause lung disease, heart disease, cancer, and many other serious health problems, but can also have a significant impact on your risk for certain vision threatening eye conditions.²

Top eye conditions that are made worse by tobacco use^{2,3}

- 1 Age-related macular degeneration (AMD)** occurs when a part of the retina, the macula, is damaged. This causes the loss of your central vision. If you smoke, you are more likely to develop AMD compared to people who do not smoke.
- 2 Cataracts** are a cloudy area in the lens of your eye that can cause blurry vision. If you smoke, you are at increased risk for getting cataracts.
- 3 Diabetic retinopathy** is when blood vessels in the eye are damaged and is a complication of diabetes. It causes blurry or distorted vision and possibly blindness. Smoking makes diabetic retinopathy more difficult to control, meaning complications are more likely.

Each year, tobacco use is responsible for the deaths of over

8M
people
worldwide¹

- 4 **Dry eye syndrome** is a common condition that occurs when your eyes do not have enough tears, which can cause eye pain and make it difficult to see clearly. Smokers are more likely to develop dry eye syndrome than non-smokers.
- 5 **Eye infections** can be frequently caused by tobacco smoke, which contains many harmful chemicals that can contaminate the eyes. Smokers who wear contact lenses are at even greater risk and are more likely to develop an eye infection than others.
- 6 **Glaucoma** is a condition that affects the optic nerve and may lead to vision loss. Smokers are twice as likely to develop glaucoma as non-smokers.¹ The risk of glaucoma also increases if you have diabetes or high blood pressure, which smoking is also strongly linked to.
- 7 **Grave's disease** is a condition that affects the body's thyroid gland. Thyroid eye disease, which increases pressure behind the eyes and may cause them to bulge forward, can develop in people who have Grave's disease. Smokers who have Grave's disease risk their eye condition getting significantly worse.
- 8 **Uveitis** is a dangerous eye disease that occurs when the middle layer of the eye (the uvea) becomes inflamed. This disease can cause red eye, pain, and vision problems. Smoking increases the likelihood of developing uveitis.

Pregnant? Smoking can harm your baby's eyes.

Smoking while pregnant increases the risk of serious health problems for babies, including premature birth, low birth weight, and birth defects including visual difficulties like retinopathy and lazy eyes.⁴

Take charge of your eye health.

Vision loss related to tobacco use and smoking can be prevented. Quitting smoking may help save your sight and eye health. In addition to quitting smoking, there are other habits that may also help protect your eyes²:

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Avoid secondhand smoke
- Monitor your blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Wear UV-protected sunglasses and a hat with a wide brim
- Schedule regular comprehensive eye exams

Learn more

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¹ CDC "Smoking and Tobacco Use": <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/php/data-statistics/adult-data-cigarettes/index.html>, Accessed April 2025

² Myvision "How Smoking Impacts Your Eye Health": <https://myvision.org/guides/smoking-effects-on-eyes>, Accessed April 2025

³ AAO "Smoking and eye Disease": <https://www.aao.org/eye-health/tips-prevention/smokers>, Accessed April 2025

⁴ CDC "Substance Use During Pregnancy": <https://nida.nih.gov/publications/research-reports/tobacco-nicotine-e-cigarettes/what-are-risks-smoking-during-pregnancy>, Accessed April 2025

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