



OPTICAL SOLUTIONS

Pharmacy aisles are well stocked with eye products, but that doesn't necessarily mean they're the best remedies for vision problems. We asked Hilary Hawthorne, O.D., a board member of the American Optometric Association, when over-the-counter options are sufficient and when it's time to set up a doctor's appointment.

Eyedrops for dryness

Head to the drugstore if... a particularly windy or dry day is to blame for your irritated eyes. The best drops are preservative-free.

See a doctor if... you've been using a product regularly or aren't sure what's giving you trouble. "Some people don't produce enough tears, while others have eyelid disorders," Hawthorne says. "Sometimes only a prescription eyedrop may provide relief."

Eye vitamins

Head to the drugstore if... your optometrist says that you're at risk for advanced age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of vision loss. Look for supplements that are made with the "AREDS" formula. These products contain nutrients, like zinc and vitamin C, that can slow the progression of the disorder.

See a doctor if... you're noticing blurred spots or other sight problems. Your doctor may suggest a supplement or other options.

Reading glasses

Head to the drugstore if... your doctor has determined that you don't need an Rx. Although drugstore eyeglasses may seem to work, they do so by magnifying print; prescription lenses help your eyes focus, so they're almost always a better solution.

See a doctor if... you haven't had an exam in at least a year. Your blurred vision may be caused by an imbalance between your eyes, and may require corrective lenses.

Eyedrops for allergies

Head to the drugstore if... itching and irritation are mild and happen only occasionally. Avoid drops that reduce redness, advises Hawthorne. These products contain vasoconstrictors, which shrink blood vessels and could make your symptoms worse.

See a doctor if... over-the-counter options aren't giving you any relief. If you suffer from chronic allergies, you'll probably need a prescription, Hawthorne says.

Losing Sleep

Sleep apnea isn't just a problem for men. As many as 50% of women may have it too. People with this disorder can temporarily stop breathing while they sleep, which can cut off the oxygen supply to their brain and lead to heart problems. If you suspect you're suffering from the condition—for example, you wake up gasping for breath or have a sore throat in the morning—talk to your primary care doctor about an evaluation.

Those who are obese or have high blood pressure are especially at risk.

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minutes of exposure to concentrated secondhand smoke can cause inflammation in your airways, impairing breathing.

Source: University of Athens

