

# Screen your eyes at home if you're overdue for an eye doctor visit

Take five minutes to screen your vision.

In this coronavirus era, many Mississippians have missed medical appointments, including important eye exams. But your eyes can be especially taxed during the stay-at-home time.

Most popular indoor activities – working at home or attending school remotely via computer, reading, watching TV or playing video games – rely on good vision.

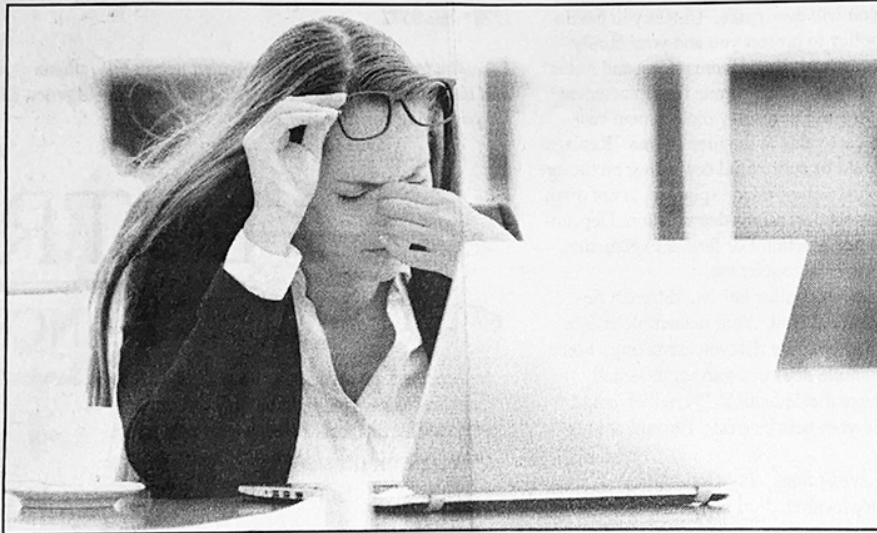
To determine if you need to make a vital visit to an eye doctor, focus on your eye health for a moment to notice any vision problems or changes, said ophthalmologist Rainna Bahadur, M.D., of Eye Associates of the South.

"People of all ages tend to adapt to vision problems and might not always notice trouble. If you or your children view the computer or TV too closely, squint to see, have frequent headaches or eye pain, those are common general signs of eye issues," added ophthalmologist Debra LaPrad.

Both are partners at Eye Associates of the South, which has clinics with optical shops in Biloxi, Ocean Springs and Gulfport.

Five board certified ophthalmologists and a veteran optometrist cover the full spectrum of eye care in the practice, including for pediatric patients.

If you encounter an eye problem, they offer in-clinic appointments (with masks, staggered scheduling and social distancing to prevent COVID-19 exposure) as well as telemedicine appointments, via computer video conferencing. The latter may be offered to patients on a case-by-case basis to allow patients to stay at home during appointments.



Here are 10 common symptoms that often mean you need to see an eye doctor.

- **Blurriness** – Probably the most commonly noticed symptom, blurry vision can mean you need anything from vision correction to treatment for a serious eye disease.

Options to correct refractive (focus) errors in your vision include new or updated eyeglasses or contact lenses, LASIK laser vision correction and, in some situations, lens implants, noted Bahadur, a cornea and refractive surgery specialist.

An eye doctor would need to diagnose any eye disease or condition that blurriness could indicate.

- **Dark spots** – Dark areas, spots or shadows across part of vision tend to be a serious sign, noted LaPrad, a general ophthalmologist.

A detached retina can appear as a dark spot or "curtain" suddenly over one eye; it must be treated immediately, as an emergency, to prevent blindness. It sometimes follows a fall or head trauma.

Darkening or loss of peripheral vision is a sign of glaucoma. Darkening or loss of central vision is a symptom of AMD (age-related macular degeneration). Both are serious eye diseases and leading causes of blindness, but can be treated by ophthalmologists.

- **Dimming vision** – Vision that seems cloudy and poorer in low light are classic symptoms of cataracts, which cloud the eye's natural lens and gradually obscure vision to the point of blindness. If you live long enough, you probably will have cataracts. But they easily are removed with cataract surgery to replace the natural lens with a clear corrective lens. Other common symptoms of cataracts are halos around light sources, blurriness and increasing "night blindness" while driving, Bahadur said.

- **Dry eyes** – An array of symptoms including dry or watery eyes, redness, stinging, light sensitivity,

inflammation, blurriness, eye fatigue and/or pain may indicate dry eye syndrome, which is very treatable. It may flare up in certain situations, such as from overuse of computers or seasonal weather. Eye Associates of the South is was named the "Dry Eye Treatment Center for the Mississippi Gulf Coast" by Allergan and Bahadur is a dry eye specialist. Over-the-counter eye drops can be counterproductive to curing dry eye.

- **Eye Infections** – Red, inflamed, gritty, itchy eyes with discharge, swelling, blurriness and/or floaters can signal various conditions – including highly contagious pinkeye (conjunctivitis) or uveitis, LaPrad said.

Pinkeye can be a symptom of the coronavirus. Some pinkeye strains can be treated at home, but bacterial or viral pinkeye may cause corneal scarring, which permanently hampers vision (possibly requiring a corneal transplant for correction).

Uveitis is a group of inflammatory diseases that produce swelling and destroy eye tissue. These diseases can slightly reduce vision or lead to severe vision loss.

See an eye doctor for any possible eye infections for early diagnosis and treatment. Never sleep in your contacts, even if the manufacturer allows it; it makes your eyes about seven times more likely to become infected.

- **Floaters** – Floaters that appear as nearly transparent cells crossing your eyes are common, especially as you age. But if there is a marked increase in floaters and you see flashes of light in the same eye and/or darkening or loss in peripheral vision, you may have a retinal tear. Contact an ophthalmologist immediately, Bahadur advised.

- **Allergies** – Allergens may include pollen, dust, pet dander or smoke. There is a mild form of non-contagious pinkeye caused by allergies, which typically causes intense itching, while the contagious more serious pinkeye does not. Other symptoms of allergies may be similar to

dry eye or infections. An eye doctor can distinguish the difference.

- **Pain** – Exterior pain on the eye's surface can be caused by irritants, such as contact lenses (which should be removed until healed), foreign objects, scratches, infection, chemical exposure or trauma. Interior eye pain can be more serious. Call an eye doctor for anything but minor problems, LaPrad advised. Eye pain with vision loss is an emergency.

- **Blemishes** – Blemishes or discoloration on the surface of the eye or eyelid can be harmless or serious, including cancer. Particularly report any swelling on the eyeball, change in the shape of a pupil, or a new dark spot on the iris to an ophthalmologist, they said.

- **Swollen Eyelid** – A sty is a red, painful bump on the edge of the eyelid caused by a bacterial infection. Often painless, a chalazion is a cyst in the eyelid and tends to be more serious; if it is infected, be careful not to let it spread into your eye. Their swelling is caused by a blocked lash follicle or gland. Both often can be treated at home with a warm moist washcloth. Do not squeeze the swollen area. An untreated sty may become a chalazion. A large cyst may put chronic pressure on the cornea and cause astigmatism; a chronic chalazion may become cancerous, noted LaPrad, an eyelid specialist.

- **No symptoms?** – What a relief. You're in the clear? Not always. There are serious eye diseases, such as glaucoma, that may have no symptoms and only can be detected by a comprehensive eye exam.

For an appointment at Eye Associates of the South, call (228) 396-5185 or visit their website at [2020view.com](http://2020view.com).