

Understanding Your Vision Part 4: Eye Symptoms That Should Never Be Ignored

Some eye symptoms can wait. Others should never be ignored. Recognising the difference is important, as early action can help protect vision.

Many serious eye conditions begin suddenly, and prompt assessment can make a significant difference.

Symptoms That Need Urgent Attention

Sudden loss of vision

A rapid drop in vision in one or both eyes is always urgent. This may appear as dimming, a shadow, or complete loss of sight.

Flashes and new floaters

Flashing lights or a sudden increase in floaters (moving spots or shapes) may indicate a retinal problem.

A shadow or “curtain” in vision

A dark area across the field of vision may suggest retinal detachment and requires immediate assessment.

Distorted vision (metamorphopsia)

Straight lines appearing bent or wavy can indicate changes at the macula.

Painful red eye with reduced vision

Pain, redness, and reduced vision together may signal inflammation, infection, or raised eye pressure.

Double vision (diplopia)

Seeing two images instead of one may be related to eye muscle or neurological problems.

Sudden severe headache with visual symptoms

A sudden, intense headache—often described as the “worst ever”—especially with visual disturbance should be taken seriously. Symptoms may include blurred or double vision, loss of part of the visual field, or sensitivity to light. Nausea and

vomiting may also occur.

This may be linked to conditions such as acute angle-closure glaucoma (often with eye pain, redness, and haloes around lights), or neurological causes such as migraine or, more rarely, bleeding around the brain. Urgent assessment is required, particularly if the symptoms are severe, unusual, or different from previous headaches.

Why Acting Early Matters

Conditions such as retinal detachment, acute glaucoma, or vascular events can progress quickly. Early treatment may preserve vision, while delay can lead to permanent loss.

What to Do

Seek urgent assessment through an optometrist, eye clinic, or emergency services if any of these symptoms occur. Do not wait to see if they improve.

For those living with low vision, any **sudden change from the usual level of sight** should be assessed without delay.

Key Message

A simple rule: **sudden, painful, or rapidly changing vision is urgent.** Recognising these warning signs and acting early can protect sight.

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