



LOOK AT THIS Even if you can boast 20/20 vision (lucky!), you should still consider getting an eye test. “The eyes are a part of the body through which we can see veins and arteries, with no surgery or cameras,” says ophthalmologist Dr Shantan Reddy. An eye doc may be the first to detect a serious condition like high blood pressure or diabetes. Behold, six surprising health cues the eyes give away.

EYE CUE SILVER-COLOURED ARTERIES
RED FLAG FOR... HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

A massive 96.5 per cent of 18- to 34-year-olds with high blood pressure were unaware they had the condition, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. And your eye guy could spot it first. “We can see hypertension through the eyes because it gives retinal arteries a silver hue that we call silver wiring,” says Reddy. If left untreated, the condition can cause blood vessels in the retina and throughout the body to harden, increasing the risk for heart attack or stroke.

EYE CUE A MOLE ON THE EYE'S INNER LAYER
RED FLAG FOR... MELANOMA

Although it's not yet proven, sunlight exposure is a likely risk factor for developing eyeball cancer. Yikes. “The cancer can look like little raised surfaces or moles in the pigment layer of the retina,” says ophthalmologist Dr Sophie Bakri. Diagnosing an eye melanoma early is crucial, she says; it often has no other symptoms and can quickly metastasise. So don't forget to wear your sunnies – even on overcast days.

EYE CUE LEAKY BLOOD VESSELS
RED FLAG FOR... DIABETES

High blood sugar can clog or damage retinal blood vessels over time, rendering them weak and porous. Eye specialists can often spot the seepage or the new, abnormal blood vessels that sprout up to replace faulty ones. Indeed, diabetes takes a big toll on the eyes in general and can lead to blindness in serious cases.

EYE CUE INFLAMMATION
RED FLAG FOR... AUTOIMMUNE DISEASE

Autoimmune conditions cause the body to attack healthy cells and tissues (including those within the eyes). “If we see inflammation inside the eye, 30 to 50 per cent of the time that patient will have some sort of undiagnosed autoimmune disease, like lupus or rheumatoid arthritis,” says Bakri. Another related symptom? Severely dry eyes – the result of compromised tear glands.

EYE CUE INTERIOR BLISTERS
RED FLAG FOR... CENTRAL SEROUS RETINOPATHY (CSR)

Gross (and seriously painful) factoid: you can get blisters inside your

eyeballs. CSR is typically caused by excessive stress, which can tax the body so much that the retina starts to leak blister-forming fluid. Ouch. “Eye doctors used to know CSR as a disease of stressed men with type A personalities, but an increasing number of women are being diagnosed,” says Bakri. Patients may have blurry vision or see wavy lines when trying to focus on a set point. In many cases, CSR can be alleviated by slashing stress levels but if not, patients may be helped by laser treatment.

EYE CUE SWOLLEN BLOOD VESSELS ON THE WHITE PORTION OF THE EYE
RED FLAG FOR... ALLERGIES

Airborne allergens such as pollen, dust and animal dander (aka animal dandruff) can often affect the eyes. As a protective mechanism, your peepers secrete histamines and other natural defence chemicals which can lead to swollen ocular surface blood vessels and painful red, itchy or watery eyes. For a proper diagnosis, see your GP or optometrist. And maybe give Fido a weekly wash.

What's laser surgery really like?



After years of clinging to contact lens drops for dear life, *WH* beauty editor Ashleigh Austen was ready to give laser eye surgery a go

For the past eight years, I've been short-sighted. The sort of myopia where you wake up at 6am and have to feel your way to the bathroom. Think somewhere between sauvignon blanc hangover and having a giant smudge on your sunglasses. Everything is a half-baked guess.

I've been wearing glasses on and off since I was 18. When I fronted up for my first uni lecture and couldn't read the projector, I booked in with an optometrist. My first pair of glasses were round, thick and black rimmed. I had a blunt fringe – a look that was more Napoleon Dynamite



QUICK TIP
If you have private health insurance, check to see if your plan covers some of the cost of laser eye surgery

than Zooey Deschanel. After a couple of years, a friend introduced me to contact lenses and my life was transformed. But my approach was rough and ready. I wore them 16 hours a day, swam in them, danced through dark clubs and scratched them out at 3am before falling into bed. The idea of damaging my eyesight took a back seat to convenience – something had to change.

Booyakasha!

A *Current Affair* horror stories aside ('Laser surgery made me blind... I could smell my cornea burning!'), I was ready to give the procedure a go. I did my research. Enter: Lasik surgery. The downtime is minimal – half a day with some Ali G goggles on and 48 hours later you're running 20/20 vision. And the scary stories? Laser eye surgery has come a long way, baby. Taking only 15 seconds per eye, there's no burning toast smell and it's suitable for about 90 per cent of patients. It successfully treats short-sightedness (myopia), long-sightedness (hyperopia) and astigmatism. And with a worsening prescription of almost -4 in both eyes, I was ready. Lasik is a two-step procedure. First, using a computer-guided laser, the surgeon makes a hinged flap in your cornea. The flap is lifted

to access the deeper layers of the cornea to reshape your lens and then the flap is replaced where it bonds to the eye – no stitches. It sounds complicated, but because it's minimally invasive, the eye heals quickly.

Taking a gamble

I book in with Dr Rick Wolfe, one of the first in Australia to carry out the surgery. An ophthalmic surgeon for over 30 years, he's done more than 20,000 laser eye operations. (You may know him as the husband of *Real Housewives of Melbourne* star Gamble Breaux. No? Moving on...) He's founder and medical director of Peninsula Eye Centre and VISTAeyes in Victoria – the Ritz-Carlton of eye surgeries. And at around \$3000 an eye, it's expensive. But as with all things medical, you get what you pay

for. And when a hot laser's involved, it isn't something you'd want to pick up on a Cudo deal. In the lead-up to the surgery I had to go contacts-free for a week to let my eyes revert to their natural shape. The day of the procedure I had a final eye test and a briefing on post-operative care. No fasting, no needles, nor hospital gowns.

Seeing the light

Before surgery, I was given a mild sedative to help me relax and anaesthetic eye drops to numb my eyes. As if having a brow wax, I lay on the bed. My eyes were held open with a machine.

This was uncomfortable, but not unbearable. I stared ahead at a green light flashing then things went dark for a few seconds before Dr Wolfe moved on to the next eye. Look, it wasn't a hoot, but I was only in the room for a total of 10 minutes. That was it. I went home and slept off the sedative, waking only to put in eye drops. When I woke the next morning, I could see: things close up, things far away. Everything. It's been three months since my surgery now and, after several follow-up appointments to check my progress, there have been no ramifications. Those days of scratching out contacts in a pinot haze are behind me. **WH**

I'VE GOT THIS EYE TEST LICKED



PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; JOHN RINTOUL