

Protect and treat your senses



By Eve Menezes Cunningham



We depend on our senses for so much. Where would we be without our vision, hearing, feeling, smell and taste?

Yet we often take them for granted. Some of these tips may appeal. Others not. You know yourself best so you can let the suggestions be a starting point for you to create your own checklist of treats for all of your senses.

Visual

'By far the biggest risk to eye health is poor uptake of regular sight tests,' says David Cartwright, Chairman, Eyecare Trust. 'Twenty million of us fail to have our eyes checked once every 2 years, as recommended, and 1 in 10 of us have never had an eye examination.'

'Sight tests are an essential health check. Not only can they detect common eye conditions, such as glaucoma, before they cause irreversible vision loss, they can also uncover signs of general health problems including diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol.'

'Smoking is directly linked to blindness. Current smokers are up to 4 times more likely to develop macular degeneration (the UK's leading cause of blindness) compared with past smokers or non-smokers.'

'Protecting your eyes starts with the food you eat. Studies have shown that nutrients in omega-3 fatty acids,

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zinc and vitamins C and E may help to prevent age-related vision problems such as macular degeneration and cataracts.

'Foods containing eye-friendly nutrients include green leafy vegetables, oily fish such as salmon and citrus fruits. You should also ensure that your alcohol intake is within the Department of Health's recommended limits.'

'Protect your eyes when it is sunny or when you're in high glare areas such as near snow or water. Cumulative UV exposure can increase your risk

Treat your eyes



- Visit your favourite works of art and let your eyes drink them in.
- Spend more time in the kinds of natural landscape that soothes your eyes and soul.
- Wear clothes you love, decorate – this isn't about overspending, just allowing your home to be an expression of your taste and a space that rests and even revitalises your sense of vision.
- Remember your favourite loved ones – who feels most like 'a sight for sore eyes' when you see them? Honour lost loved ones by hanging their pictures up where they'll help you smile.

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of developing cataracts and macular degeneration.

'When choosing sunglasses make sure that they are safe as well as stylish! Look out for the CE, UV 400 or British Standard marks – this ensures they provide a safe level of protection from the sun's damaging UVA and UVB rays.

'Although working at a computer won't harm your eyes, sitting staring at a screen for long periods can cause "screen fatigue" – sore, itchy or tired eyes; headaches; impaired colour perception and temporary blurring. It is important to take regular breaks to keep your eyes feeling fresh and bright.

'Each of us spends an average of 2,740 hours (or three and a half months) a year staring at a screen! So, it's probably no surprise that 90 per cent of screen users say they regularly suffer from screen fatigue – headaches, sore or tired eyes and problems with close-up and long-distance vision.

'By being Screen Smart you can help minimise your risk of suffering visual distress and keep your eyes feeling fresh and bright. Give your eyes a rest: follow the 20-20-20 rule – look away from your screen every 20 minutes, for 20 seconds and focus on objects 20 feet away.

'Position copy documents at roughly the same distance as your eyes are from the screen to avoid having to continually refocus, dim the lights – the ratio of ambient (surrounding) light to monitor light should be three to one – and minimise any glare or reflections.

'Position your monitor an arm's length away and keep your eyes level with the top of the screen. Select a font size of 12 points or above and make sure you have a clean screen. Your blink rate can fall by up to 400 per cent when working at a screen.

'If you wear contact lenses, make sure you look after them properly. Wash and dry your hands thoroughly before touching your contact lenses or your eyes and only ever clean your contacts using the contact lens solution recommended by your practitioner.

'Never shower, sleep or swim with your contacts lenses in because this can put you at risk of developing a serious eye infection which could lead to blindness.



Also, don't wear them for longer than recommended by your practitioner or the manufacturer.

'Your weight can also affect your eye health. A Body Mass Index of 30 or more doubles your risk of AMD (age-related macular degeneration) and significantly increases your chances of developing cataracts. Early obesity is also associated with diabetes. Sixty per cent of people with type 2 diabetes will develop diabetic retinopathy.'

I used to think that eye health was mostly down to genes but David says, 'According to the RNIB more than 50 per cent of sight loss is avoidable, yet many of us are reluctant to get our eyes examined until we notice that our sight has declined, at which point irreparable damage may already have been done.

'You are never too young to start looking after your eyes. Protecting children's eyes is important to give their vision the best possible start. Make sure your children have regular sight tests, eat a rainbow of fruit and vegetables and wear UV protection on sunny days. Recent research has also highlighted the benefits of kids spending more time outdoors to help prevent the onset of myopia (short-sightedness).

'Staying fit and healthy is important for your general eye health. The eyes need oxygen to stay healthy and comfortable. Aerobic exercise can help increase oxygen supplies to the optic nerve and lower any pressure that builds up in the eye. Reducing intraocular "eye" pressure can help control conditions such as glaucoma and ocular hypertension.

Doing 30 minutes exercise 5 days a week is recommended by the Department of Health. Brisk walks, cycling and swimming are all excellent

ways to reduce intraocular pressure and maintain healthy eyes.'

Auditory

'Attend regular hearing tests to monitor hearing levels and keep on top of the early signs of hearing loss,' says Hannah Leech, HCPC Registered Hearing Aid Dispenser, Hidden Hearing Ltd. 'Be aware of changes in the hearing of family members and friends. We offer free

Treat your ears



- While many people use their phones as everything apart from phones, why not use yours to connect with loved ones? Enjoy the sounds of their voices.
- Create playlists of your favourite music and sounds including the seaside, waves, birdsong, your child's laughter, a cat's purr – whatever lifts you. Notice them and let them soothe your ears.
- Notice favourite sounds in real life, too.



- hearing consultations either in one of our 120 branches or in the comfort of your own home.

'Be mindful of noise exposure – at music concerts, in industry, etc. It's advisable to wear hearing protection in these situations. Ear wax is normal. It's not advised to clean your ears with anything other than medicated Olive oil drops once you have seen a GP or health practitioner.'

Kinaesthetic

The skin is our largest organ and it puts up with a lot from us. Just as we can normally deal with a fair bit, but sun burn makes everything (even the slightest breeze) hurt, when our emotions are well balanced, life's that much easier to handle. When less so, we can feel prickly.

You might want to treat your skin to a massage either using a special chair or other massage tools or by going to a qualified massage therapist.

Pay attention to the feelings you enjoy the most. Remember in *Amélie* when Amélie (Audrey Tatou) put her hand in the vat of grains and it being one of the things she liked? I'm not suggesting you alienate your local health food supplier but think about similar sensations you might like which you can recreate for yourself.

Do you like getting your hands dirty? Cooking? Cleaning? Painting? Making things? Fixing things?

Notice which are your favourite types



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of movement. While we all benefit from exercise, some people love running while others can think of little worse. Choose activities that lift your spirits and tune into your body's every move as you appreciate and look after it.

Respectfully (to yourself and others), pay attention to the ways you like to touch and be touched.

Treat yourself to fabrics that not only look good but also feel amazing next to your skin.

Olfactory

Notice your favourite smells – fresh coffee? Fresh bread? Loved one's scents?

Treat your nose with an aromatherapy massage or perfume. You could even try dotting a couple of drops of your favourites onto a tissue and carrying it around for a boost.

Gustatory

Notice your favourite flavours and really enjoy them, maybe in teas, in unusual ice creams (lavender?) and other things that will help you hone and enjoy your taste buds. ●

Body language



Louise Hay popularised the notion that our bodies speak to us in metaphors.

If you're having issues with your eyes, you might want to ask them what they're trying to tell you. Is there something you're not willing to see about yourself or in your life?

Maybe there's something you don't want to listen to? Skin is associated with protecting ourselves and fears. What might that rash / spot / bite or whatever be telling you? Hay says our noses represent self-worth. If you have issues with your mouth, are you resisting nourishment in some way?

Tune into your body's wisdom and see what messages pop up for you.