

selfdefense

■ **Chewing gum may speed recovery from surgery.** *Recent finding:* Following abdominal surgery, patients who chewed gum required less time to return to normal bowel function, had fewer instances of blocked bowels and reported less nausea and vomiting. *Theory:* Chewing gum helps the body release gastrointestinal hormones that aid in recovery.

Analysis of five studies with a total of 158 patients by researchers at St. Mary's Hospital, London, UK, published in *Archives of Surgery*.

■ **Shred unwanted credit cards** or cut them into many small pieces, and dispose of the bits in separate garbage bags. The old recommendation to cut an old card in half is no longer enough. *Reason:* Some cards give the entire credit card number on both the front and the back. A crook who finds only one half of the card might be able to figure out the complete number by combining the numbers on the back with those on the front.

Edgar Dworsky, founder, ConsumerWorld.org, Boston.

■ **If you go to a Web site to see a video** and a message there says that you need an updated software program to view the video, *don't* click on that message—this is one way that computers become infected with viruses. Instead, go to the site of the software maker, and look for updates there.

Atul Prakash, PhD, professor in the department of electrical engineering and computer science, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.

■ **To care for your hands after gardening and yard work**, clean them with a gentle, soap-free cleanser, not a harsh detergent. Remove gardening odors by using a cleanser containing extracts of parsley or cucumber. If you need an exfoliating scrub to get rid of dirt, be sure it includes aloe or shea butter to avoid irritation. After cleaning your hands, treat them with a hand cream that contains moisturizers, such as *glycerin, panthenol or petrolatum*.

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Reading in Dim Light Hurts Your Vision

And Other Common Eye Myths



Brett Levinson, MD

Almost one-quarter of all American adults are nearsighted, and everyone over age 40 will have increasing difficulty reading fine print or seeing clearly in dim light.

Most people understand that age is the main reason for declines in eye health and vision, but there's still a lot of confusion about other factors that help or hurt the eyes. Common myths...

MYTH: Sitting too close to the TV hurts the eyes.

Reality: Generations of mothers have scolded their children for sitting too close to the television. This might have made sense in the 1940s, when TVs emitted fairly high levels of radiation, but it isn't a factor anymore.

Today you could sit with your nose pressed against the screen, and it wouldn't hurt your eyes. If you do watch TV up close, you might experience eyestrain because the eyes aren't designed for prolonged, short-distance viewing. This may result in a headache, but apart from this, there aren't any risks associated with up-close TV watching.

MYTH: You'll damage your eyes if you read in dim light.

Reality: Using your eyes, even under difficult viewing conditions, doesn't hurt them. You won't damage your vision by reading in dim light any more than you could hurt your ears by listening to quiet music, but you may develop eyestrain.

MYTH: Computer monitors cause eye damage.

Reality: Computer monitors are no more likely than TVs to damage the eyes. However, people who spend a lot of time in front of the computer

might experience an increase in eye dryness. People don't blink normally when they're engaged in prolonged, up-close focusing. When you're working on the computer, you might blink less than once every 10 seconds. That's not enough to lubricate the eyes. Infrequent blinking causes additional problems in older adults because their tear film is effective for only about seven or eight seconds between blinks—about half as long as in younger adults.

Recommended: During computer sessions, take an "eye break" at least once an hour. Shift your vision to something farther away, and consciously blink every few seconds. Use an over-the-counter natural teardrop to remoisturize your eyes. Good brands include Systane, Optive, Soothe XP and Refresh.

MYTH: Using stronger reading glasses than you need weakens vision.

Reality: No, it is not true that using a stronger power than you need makes your eyes come to need that power. You can wear any power reading glasses that you want. You need to choose reading glasses based on the distance at which you work. You may want a stronger power for reading the newspaper than for working on the computer.

MYTH: Redness means infection.

Reality: Eye infections are ▶

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Brett Levinson, MD, an ophthalmologist who trained at the prestigious Wills Eye Institute in Philadelphia. He is director of the Cornea and Anterior Segment at Select Eye Care in Baltimore and a clinical instructor in ophthalmology at University of Maryland School of Medicine.





Scientist speaks

Susan B. Roberts, PhD ■ Tufts University

The Trick to Losing Weight Forever... Don't Follow Your Instincts

Generations ago, when food was scarce, humans ate as much as they could in order to survive. Today we innately cling to those same instincts. Specifically, we are hardwired to eat in response to five triggers. Here, how to combat these triggers...

HUNGER

To get ahead of hunger pains...

Focus on protein. Proteins are digested slowly, sending nutrients into the bloodstream over a period of several hours. Thus, high-protein entrées, such as chicken, fish and eggs, slow the return of hunger.

Add high-fiber fare—including fruits and vegetables. Research at Tufts University shows that people who eat 35 to 45 grams of fiber per day feel more satisfied and lose more pounds.

Spice it up. You feel more satiated when you eat spicy food.

AVAILABILITY

We tend to eat more when more is available. To combat this...

Have healthy options around. Strive to buy only good-for-you food—and if you do buy treats, buy only small portion sizes.

At mealtimes, don't put big platters of food on the table unless it's something that's okay to eat in large quantities, such as vegetables. Serve yourself at the stove or counter.

Limit eating out. It is difficult to avoid large portions and calorie-rich foods when dining out.

CALORIE DENSITY

High-calorie foods used to be important for supplying energy. Today we eat too many calories to burn off...

Pair your treat with a reasonable portion of a low-calorie and/or high-fiber food. Eat chips with low-fat yogurt dip and slices of red pepper. Or enjoy a hamburger topped with lettuce, tomato, onion and pickles. This way you can

indulge but still not overeat.

Schedule temptation. If you really love cake, pick a day, say Saturday, and make that the day you eat cake. Then your body expects it and is less likely to desire cake at other times.

Sleep. People who sleep five hours or less a night are typically about five pounds heavier than peers who sleep seven hours or more. Sleep deprivation causes you to crave high-calorie foods.

FAMILIARITY

Pining for a certain food usually is programmed in the brain—you tried it once, and the payoff was delicious. You want to repeat that sensation.

Seek out ways to make food healthier. For example, if you're trying to switch from juice to water, use a step-down method. Substitute 10% of the juice for water and so forth until 90% water is your drink of choice.

Tap your forehead rather than giving in. Tap five fingers against your forehead at regular intervals until the longings go away. Studies shows that this helps displace cravings.

Avoid temptation. Don't drive by the local ice-cream shop.

VARIETY

Studies show that we eat more when we have more choices. Rather than limit yourself to a few foods, offer yourself lots of *healthy* choices, such as a wide variety of vegetables. Dress them up with a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese or olive oil to experience different flavors.

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Susan B. Roberts, PhD, professor of nutrition and psychiatry at Tufts University, Boston. Roberts is a senior scientist and director of Tufts' Energy Metabolism Laboratory. She is author, with Betty Kelly Sargent, of *The Instinct Diet* (Workman). She also has written nearly 200 articles on nutrition and obesity in research journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *The Lancet* and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. www.instinctdiet.com



▶▶ relatively infrequent compared with the cases of red eyes from noninfectious causes. Viral infections (which do not respond to antibiotics) occur somewhat more often but also are relatively uncommon.

Eye redness usually is due to simple irritation of the surface of the eye—from allergies or from dryness, for example, or from *blepharitis*, an inflammation of the eyelid, which also can cause dry eyes.

Self-test: The eye will be very red if you have an infection (bacterial or viral). With a bacterial infection, you might notice a thick yellow-white discharge. A viral infection is likely to have a clear, continuous watery discharge. Viral *conjunctivitis* (commonly called "pink eye") results in a very irritated, very red eye, which often spreads to the other eye in one to three days. Typically, people with pink eye have had a cold recently or have been exposed to someone with pink eye.

Pink eye is very contagious and can quickly spread to family members and coworkers. To reduce the spread of infection, limit your contact with other people and wash hands frequently. Unlike bacterial conjunctivitis, which is treated with antibiotic eyedrops, there is no treatment for viral pink eye except lubricating eyedrops to reduce discomfort.

MYTH: Extended-wear contacts are safe to keep in when you sleep.

Reality: The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved extended-wear contact lenses that you can keep in when you sleep, but I see a lot of patients with eye inflammation caused by these lenses.

The *cornea*, the transparent front of the eye, takes in oxygen all the time. Wearing a contact lens for extended periods reduces oxygen at the eye surface. Silicone hydrogen lenses allow much more oxygen to get to the cornea, but even they can cause irritation and infection when worn too long.

Always follow your doctor's instructions. If your contact lenses are designed to be worn for two or four weeks, then change them at the recommended

frequency. If you are wearing your contacts overnight and your eyes become irritated or red, stop wearing them and see your eye doctor. Generally, if you take your contacts out each night, there's less risk for infection and irritation.

Irritation sometimes can be caused by multipurpose or cleaning solutions. Multipurpose solutions (Opti-Free, ReNu) include chemicals designed to kill bacteria, and some people become sensitive to these products. I recommend a product called Clear Care. The active ingredient, hydrogen peroxide, kills bacteria and other germs. Then, after six hours of soaking, the solution turns into saline.

For people who have trouble wearing contacts, one-day disposable lenses are another possibility. They are more expensive than the extended-wear lenses but don't require disinfectant solutions.

MORE from Dr. Levinson

Can Supplements Protect Your Eyes?

There's evidence that nutritional supplements can help eye patients who have already been diagnosed with age-related macular degeneration. A National Institutes of Health study found that patients with the disease who took a daily combination of beta-carotene (15 mg), vitamin C (500 mg), vitamin E (400 IU), zinc (80 mg) and copper (2 mg) were 25% less likely to progress to an advanced form of the disease.

This was an impressive finding, but there is no solid evidence that nutritional supplements *prevent* macular degeneration or other eye problems in healthy people.

Exception: Fish oil. Studies show that patients with mild-to-moderate eye dryness usually improve after taking oral supplements of fish oil. I advise patients to buy a product that contains both *docosahexaenoic acid* (DHA) and *eicosapentaenoic acid* (EPA) and follow the dosage instructions on the label.

From a Saville Row–Trained Tailor

A Man's Guide to Dressing Well For Less

Stephen Kempson



Many men have trimmed their clothing budgets these days because of the weak economy, but this is no time to look shabby. Wearing old or low-quality suits can create the impression that *you* are old or low quality. Fortunately, you can get a great look without paying a lot...

WHERE TO SHOP

High-end department stores' private label suits offer the best value for the money. These suits typically are comparable in quality to the designer suits sold at that store but at a fraction of the price. Top department stores employ skilled salespeople and tailors, which greatly increases the odds that you will wind up in a suit appropriate for your body type.

Among the best department store private label suits...

Nordstrom's John W. Nordstrom and Broletto labels. These suits in the \$600 range can be just as handsome as Hickey Freeman suits costing \$1,000 or more, and Nordstrom's sales staff is excellent. There is arguably no better value in men's suits.

Saks Fifth Avenue label. Saks's private label suits also compare favorably to those costing much more. (Suits start at \$695.) Saks, too, employs very qualified salespeople.

Clothing discounters offer attractive deals as well, but they typically do not provide high-quality customer service. Shopping for suits at discounters is appropriate only if you already know which suits and sizes tend to look good on you...and you have a tailor you trust to make alterations.

SUIT SELECTION

If your budget is limited, it's better to purchase one or two high-quality suits than three or four less expensive suits.

Not only do well-made suits look better, they last longer, making them a smart long-term investment. Cheap suits can start to show wear after just a few trips to the dry cleaner.

Choose timeless styles that won't look dated in a few years. That means dark gray or blue fabric...and subtle patterns, such as solids or barely visible stripes.

One- or two-button suits can be the right choice for short, stocky men who look boxy in three-button suits. Double-breasted suits are a good choice for very slender men.

Select suits made from medium-weight 8.5-ounce to 10-ounce fabric. Such fabric is appropriate year-round, eliminating the need to purchase different suits for each season. Air-conditioning and heating make very heavy or light fabrics impractical for modern life anyway.

SHIRTS, SHOES AND ACCESSORIES

To finish off your look and wear with your suit...

Dress shirts. Conservative white or light blue dress shirts are timeless and especially popular now. A subtle stripe or small check pattern on a ▶

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Stephen Kempson, a Saville Row–trained tailor and founder of Stephen Kempson London, a custom tailor and clothier located just off Madison Avenue in Manhattan. Kempson (pictured above) has outfitted leaders in business, entertainment and the media. www.stephenkempson.com