



The Eyes Tell Our Story

How Integrative Doctors See Into Whole-Body Health

by Linda Sechrist

To poets, the eyes have long been known as windows to the soul. Systemically trained ophthalmologists, optometrists and functional medicine doctors see these organs as a potential indicator of high blood pressure,

diabetes, stress-related effects and nutritional deficiencies, as well as sites for potential glaucoma and macular degeneration.

The connection between overall health and eye health is rarely addressed

during conventional eye exams, which are based on standard protocols for prescribing eyeglasses, drugs or surgery. Conventionally trained optometrists and ophthalmologists, lacking education in nutrition and alternative approaches,

treat the eyes as isolated organs. In contrast, systemically oriented, holistic eye experts treat them as integrated parts of the whole body.

Eye doctors like Marc R. Grossman, doctor of optometry, a co-founder of Natural Eye Care, Inc., of New Paltz, New York, and Edward C. Kondrot, a medical doctor and founder of the Healing the Eye & Wellness Center, in Fort Myers, Florida, take such a preventive and integrative approach. They recommend good whole foods nutrition, supplemented with antioxidants and plant-based formulations of omega-6 and omega-3 oils, together with adequate sleep and exercise. Key complementary treatments can be effective in improving sight and reversing some conditions.

Grossman, also a licensed acupuncturist, explains in his book *Greater Vision: A Comprehensive Program for Physical, Emotional and Spiritual Clarity* how he incorporates the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of vision into his philosophy of eye care. At Somers Eye Center, in Somers, New York, he uses a full range of mind-body therapies, combined with conventional methods to address dry eye syndrome, nearsightedness, farsightedness, macular degeneration, cataracts and glaucoma.

Kondrot, a leading board-certified homeopathic ophthalmologist, uses a slit-lamp binocular microscope to examine the complex living tissue of the eyes. The author of *10 Essentials to Save Your Sight*, he's experienced in regeneration nutrition and maintains that our overall health impacts our vision. His toolbox includes multimodal protocols like homeopathy, detoxification, oxygen therapy, low-level microcurrent to stimulate cellular activity, palming (using the hands over closed eyes) and other alternative methods to reverse visual loss. He regularly uses the Myers' cocktail, an intravenous therapy with a high concentration of B-complex and C vitamins, taurine (an amino sulfonic acid), trace minerals and zinc.

"Regardless of your eye condition, regular eye exercises can increase eye muscle flexibility and support circulation for better delivery of oxygen, essential nutrients and the flow of energy to the eyes," says Grossman. He notes that "Aerobic Exercise Protects Retinal

Function and Structure from Light-Induced Retinal Degeneration," a study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in 2014, was the first of its kind to link physical exercise with improved retinal health and prevention of common eye diseases.

While Kondrot emphasizes that vitamins A, C, D and E are essential to eye health, particularly in preventing macular degeneration, he cautions that taking a supplement is no substitute for expanding the diet to include foods such as kale, spinach, parsley, collard greens, cooked broccoli, green peas, pumpkin and Brussels sprouts. All include lutein and zeaxanthin, two types of important carotenoids contained within the retina and found in the leaves of most green plants. Digestive enzymes, probiotics and the amino acid betaine are also necessary to facilitate better absorption of nutrients.

Dr. Connie Casebolt, board certified in family medicine and founder of GFM Wellness, in Greenville, South Carolina, practices with a whole body-mind perspective and incorporates supplements in patient disease prevention and

wellness plans. "As the eye is bathed in the same chemicals and nutrients as the rest of the body, eye conditions can be affected by problems affecting the rest of the body," she says. "Low adrenals can contribute to macular degeneration. Additionally, disruption of the energy flowing through acupuncture meridians related to teeth affected by root canals can also affect the eyes. "

She likes the book *Whole Body Dentistry*, by Mark Breiner, a doctor of dental surgery, because it includes numerous case histories of systemic illnesses, including eye disorders, that improve with better oral health. "Trying to sustain good health and avoiding toxins such as tobacco and excess sugar can definitely help in maintaining good vision," explains Casebolt.

Sensitive, complex and composed of more than two million working parts, the eyes are their own phenomenon. Annual eye exams are important at every age to help us do what's needed to maintain our precious gift of sight.

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