

Night Blindness

“Then he touched their eyes and said, ‘According to your faith will it be done to you’; and their sight was restored.” *Matthew 9:29-30*

Night blindness refers to difficulty seeing in the dark or in dim lighting. The first sign most people notice is difficulty driving at night. Or a person might note that it takes a very long time for their eyes to adjust in a movie theater. Night blindness is not considered to be an actual disease, but more of a symptom of another problem.

The cause can be as simple as a person being more nearsighted (inability to see far away) at night. The treatment may be as easy as a stronger lens to be worn at night. Another common cause involves the receptor cells in the retina—if these are damaged, there is no real treatment. Cataracts can blur the vision and prevent enough light from entering the eye, causing night blindness. Other possible causes include Retinitis pigmentosa (a Vitamin A deficiency), Glaucoma, and birth defects.

In order to determine the cause of a person’s night blindness, the doctor will need a good history of the symptoms. The physician will ask about blurry vision, any difficulty moving around in the dark, and if your peripheral vision is affected.

Most people who experience this problem can be helped. If the cause of their night blindness is blurry vision that occurs only at night, the fix is a simple one. Corrective lenses will allow them to have greatly improved vision. Unfortunately, many people do not seek help, because they have perfect vision during the day!

Our retina acts like the film in a camera, and allows us to recognize light. It needs vitamin A in order to do its job. A vitamin A deficiency is simple to treat, but is not the cause of night blindness for most Americans. We get plenty of Vitamin A from milk, margarine, oranges, sweet potatoes, and carrots. Surprisingly, our liver can store up to a YEARS worth of vitamin A. This is a condition commonly seen in third world countries where basic nutrition is a problem.

Retinitis pigmentosa is a rare genetic disease of the eye, which slowly destroys the eye’s ability to sense light. It can be slowed with vitamin A supplements, but this should be done under a physician’s supervision. Mega doses of vitamin A have been linked to birth defects, so don’t fall into that dangerous mindset of believing that vitamins are “harmless.” Large doses of any vitamin may have unexpected, unwanted consequences.

Cataracts can cause a blinding glare or halo around lights at night, which makes it very difficult to see in the dark. Cataracts can be easily diagnosed and treated by an eye surgeon. Glaucoma is 100% treatable, and can be diagnosed with a good exam from an eye doctor. Eye drops will control glaucoma, but **must** be taken as directed.

If you notice difficulty seeing in dim light, or have any changes or problems with your vision, make an appointment with your optometrist or optomologist. It may be something that can be treated simply, or it may be a symptom of an underlying condition you didn’t even know you had.

Don’t remain in the dark—see your eye doctor!

For more information, check out: www.clevelandclinic.org or www.healthology.com/eye-care

Blessings,
Nurse Karen