

# SHEDDING SOME LIGHT ON NIGHT BLINDNESS

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For many people, the quality of vision they possess at night is significantly less than the eyesight they enjoy during the day. Although not completely blind, these individuals have something known as night blindness or nyctalopia. While not a disease in and of itself, night blindness is often symptomatic of an underlying deficiency or condition.

To protect and preserve your eyesight, it's essential to discuss any issues affecting your eye health and vision with your eye doctor. It's especially important to contact your optometrist for any problems that arise suddenly or have a rapid onset. Remember, it's helpful to jot down a list of your symptoms so that you can give the eye doctor a complete picture of what you are experiencing.

Night blindness is a frustrating problem. In addition to difficulty seeing in the dark or low lighting conditions, it's often challenging to adjust your eyes as you transition from a well-lit environment into a dimly lit one. It's also exceedingly difficult to drive at night. While night blindness for some people is a lifelong problem present since birth, it's frequently due to disease, injury, or nutritional deficiencies.

Some common underlying causes for night blindness include the following:

**Cataracts** - As cataracts cloud the lens of your eye and distort incoming light, your night vision diminishes. You may see halos around lights, have difficulty with glare and experience blurry vision.

**Nearsightedness (myopia)** - Very nearsighted may have difficulty seeing at night or in low lighting.

**Nutritional deficiencies** - Healthy vision relies on a healthy diet. If you're deficient in vitamin A or are not getting enough zinc, you may develop problems with night vision.



**Diabetes** – Uncontrolled blood sugar levels can damage the small blood vessels in the back of the eye. One of the earliest symptoms of diabetic retinopathy is night blindness.

**Medication Side Effects** – Some medications such as the ones for glaucoma constrict the pupils and may cause night blindness.

**Aging eyes** –Over the year, age-related changes to structures within the eye can make it more difficult to see at night.

**Prolonged exposure to Sunlight** – Besides contributing to cataract development, overexposure to UV rays without the appropriate eyewear can cause transitory nyctalopia, or temporary night blindness.

**Keratoconus** - This condition causes the cornea to change from a dome shape to a bulging, more conical one. In addition to experiencing blurred vision and problems with night vision, you may also see halos forming around lights in the dark.

**Retinitis Pigmentosa and Usher Syndrome** – A decline in night vision is typically among the earliest symptoms of these two genetic disorders.

A comprehensive eye exam from your eye doctor is the best way to assess your eye health and identify what is causing your night blindness, along with any other vision problems. Correcting night blindness depends on its underlying cause. In many cases, you can prevent the onset of night blindness, slow its progression, and alleviate some of the symptoms by taking steps to address nutritional deficiencies, improving blood sugar control, and getting corrective lenses or treatment for nearsightedness. Cataract surgery can also improve a person's night vision. However, while the hope is that a cure gets found, it's not yet possible to effectively treat night blindness caused by genetic conditions or birth defects.

If you have a problem with night blindness, it's wise to avoid driving at night. In addition to wearing sunglasses outside, you may also find it helpful to wear a brimmed hat or sunglasses as you make the initial transition indoors. As your trusted partner in care, your optometrist can help protect and preserve your eye health and vision while providing treatment to keep you more comfortable and safer in low-light conditions.