

Dispelling the Myths: How Much Do You Know About Nearsightedness?

You may hear the term “nearsighted” when you or someone you know needs vision correction, but how much do you actually know about this common condition?

A person who is nearsighted has trouble focusing on objects at a distance, but can clearly see things that are up close – or near. In contrast, farsightedness, also referred to as hyperopia, is when you can easily see things at a distance, but you struggle to see things that are up close.

Nearsightedness, which is also called myopia, is the most common refractive error of the eye. A refractive error occurs when the shape of the eye interferes with clear vision; when you look at something, light passes through your cornea and lens and then is focused on your retina, which is the part of the eye that sends signals to the brain. If the shape of your eye causes that light to land in front of the retina, rather than directly on it, objects that are far away will look blurry – you’ll be nearsighted.

As far as doctors are able to determine, a number of factors can contribute to nearsightedness, and evidence over time indicates that both heredity and habits come into play in determining whether a person is nearsighted.

Heredity plays a big part, so if you’ve heard that you can “strengthen” your eyes and correct vision problems through exercises, wearing pinhole glasses, or using glasses with a weaker prescription than what you need, optometrists are likely to tell you not to get your hopes up. On the other hand, all those times your parents told you that you’d go blind if you kept reading in the dark, they might have been onto something (albeit in an exaggerated form).

If you’ve heard that cases of nearsightedness are increasing over time, it turns out that is not a myth. According to the most recent [National Eye Institute research data](#), between 2000 and 2010, cases of myopia increased by approximately 12.5%. Nobody is able to point to a definitive reason for this increase, but doctors speculate that it could be due to the rise in computer use.

Nearsightedness can generally be corrected with glasses, contact lenses, or surgery. If you’re nearsighted, when you get your prescription, the first number will be preceded by a minus sign (if you’re farsighted, the first number will have a plus sign in front of it). The higher the number after the minus sign, the more nearsighted you are.

As cases of nearsightedness continue to increase, doctors are focusing their efforts on finding new ways to treat, and possibly even to prevent, the condition. If you’re one of the thousands of people wearing corrective lenses for nearsightedness, you’re in good company. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan were both nearsighted; Benjamin Franklin was both

nearsighted and farsighted (resulting in his invention of bifocals); and everybody's favorite Wolverine, Hugh Jackman, is so nearsighted, he is unable to read teleprompters and chooses, instead, to memorize his lines when required to speak in public.

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