

Survey shows New Zealanders have poor knowledge of threats to eye health and vision

Awareness and knowledge of the importance of eye health is a critical prerequisite for motivating eye care behaviours and access to care.^{1,2}

Eye health is an important public health concern because visual impairment can negatively impact the public healthcare burden,^{3,4} independent living, quality of life, mental health, and accident rates, as well as increasing the need for community services, family support, and earlier institutional care.^{5,6,7,8,9}

Moreover, increasing public awareness of eye health in NZ is critical as approximately 20 percent of patients experience blindness that is preventable.¹⁰ (For example, around 68,000 New Zealanders over the age of 40 currently have glaucoma – half of whom do not know they have the disease.^{11,12}

In addition, sight-threatening diseases such as diabetes, which causes diabetic retinopathy are more prevalent in Maori and Pacific Island populations, as well as among lower income and elderly, who have less access to regular quality health care.^{13,14,15,16,17,18,19}

Raising eye health awareness is important for consumers, health providers, and healthcare policy makers.

In a recently published article about eye health in New Zealand the authors investigate public knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to eye health and disease.

In a 22-item survey of 507 New Zealand adults 47% of participants reported that they felt “uniformed or very uniformed” about eye health; 41% of participants over 55 years of age were not aware that macular degeneration could lead to blindness; 74 % responded that reading under dim lights was “bad for your eyes”; but only 64 % responded that “smoking cigarettes” was “bad for your eyes”. The majority of respondents (73%) reported requiring some form of vision correction but only 66 % had an eye exam in the last 5 years.

When asked what might help them, people responded with comments like:

“I would like to see more awareness on how people can look after their eyes, as sight is such a precious thing”; and “More emphasis on getting your eyes checked regularly. Could tie into getting your health check done yearly. For example, with dentist checks, doctor checks, and mole checks”.

With actual knowledge of threats to sight being quite low and the impact of vision loss and blindness being quite high, GPs need to consider advising patients to have regular eye exams as part of a healthy lifestyle.

The full text archive of this journal is available at www.emeraldinsight.com/0965-4283.htm

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Fun Facts about eyes:

Your eyelashes have an average life span of 5 months

Your eyes are composed of more than 2 million individual cells

The average person blinks over 3.6 million times a year

Many hamsters only blink one eye at a time

When you blink, you shut your eyes for 0.3 seconds. That’s a total of 30 minutes each day!

Your eye will focus on about 50 things per second

People generally read 25% slower from a computer screen than from paper

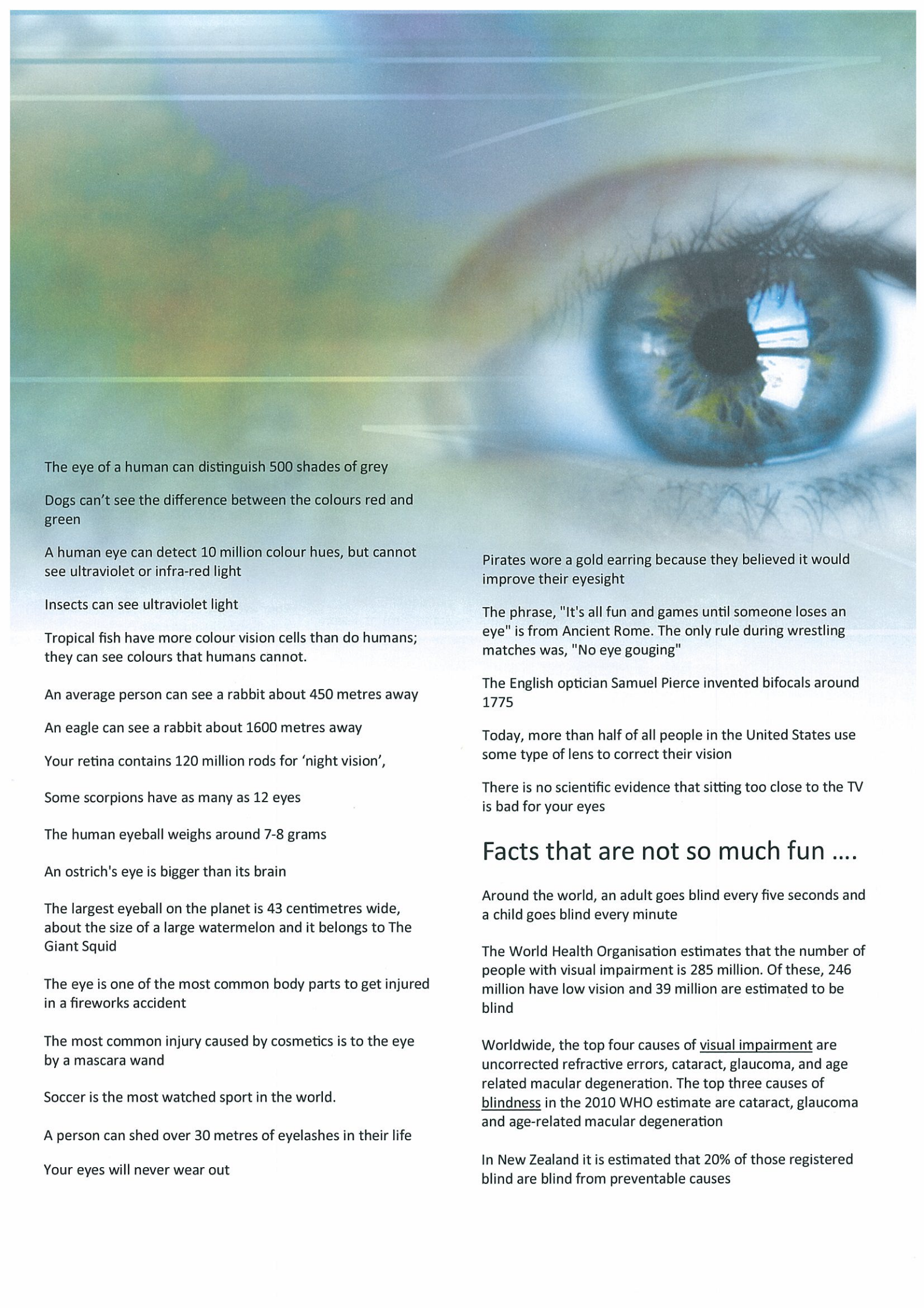
It is impossible to sneeze with your eyes open

The highest recorded speed of a sneeze is 165 km per hour

The older we are the less tears we produce

Your retina contains 8 million cones that are colour sensitive and work best under daylight conditions

Many people know little about eyes and eye health so rely on their GP to guide them when an eye examination is needed.



The eye of a human can distinguish 500 shades of grey

Dogs can't see the difference between the colours red and green

A human eye can detect 10 million colour hues, but cannot see ultraviolet or infra-red light

Insects can see ultraviolet light

Tropical fish have more colour vision cells than do humans; they can see colours that humans cannot.

An average person can see a rabbit about 450 metres away

An eagle can see a rabbit about 1600 metres away

Your retina contains 120 million rods for 'night vision',

Some scorpions have as many as 12 eyes

The human eyeball weighs around 7-8 grams

An ostrich's eye is bigger than its brain

The largest eyeball on the planet is 43 centimetres wide, about the size of a large watermelon and it belongs to The Giant Squid

The eye is one of the most common body parts to get injured in a fireworks accident

The most common injury caused by cosmetics is to the eye by a mascara wand

Soccer is the most watched sport in the world.

A person can shed over 30 metres of eyelashes in their life

Your eyes will never wear out

Pirates wore a gold earring because they believed it would improve their eyesight

The phrase, "It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye" is from Ancient Rome. The only rule during wrestling matches was, "No eye gouging"

The English optician Samuel Pierce invented bifocals around 1775

Today, more than half of all people in the United States use some type of lens to correct their vision

There is no scientific evidence that sitting too close to the TV is bad for your eyes

Facts that are not so much fun

Around the world, an adult goes blind every five seconds and a child goes blind every minute

The World Health Organisation estimates that the number of people with visual impairment is 285 million. Of these, 246 million have low vision and 39 million are estimated to be blind

Worldwide, the top four causes of visual impairment are uncorrected refractive errors, cataract, glaucoma, and age related macular degeneration. The top three causes of blindness in the 2010 WHO estimate are cataract, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration

In New Zealand it is estimated that 20% of those registered blind are blind from preventable causes