

Fastfacts

Smoking and eye disease

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Key points

- 56% of smokers are unaware of the link between smoking and eye disease
- tobacco smoke is composed of at least 7000 active chemicals, most of them toxic and potentially damaging to the eye. These chemicals reduce the body's ability to protect itself by concurrently increasing the levels of oxidants and decreasing the levels of antioxidants in the body
- repeated exposure to tobacco smoke accelerates the body's ageing process, including that of the eyes
- ASH Scotland has teamed up with the RNIB, the Association of Optometrists and NHS Inform Scotland to [design a stop smoking advice card](#)

Cataract

- on-going research suggests that tobacco smoking may be involved in cataract development, and that a smoker's risk of cataract increases with the amount smoke

Diabetes

- smoking is a risk factor for diabetic retinopathy. Smoking increases blood pressure and raises blood sugar levels, making it harder to control diabetes
- giving up smoking can help prevent retinopathy in diabetics, when high blood sugar levels damage the cells at the back of the eye

Macular degeneration

- high blood pressure, directly caused by smoking, is a risk factor for macular degeneration. Smoking causes blood vessels to narrow throughout the body, including the blood vessels to the eye
- smoking can cause or worsen several eye disorders, in particular greatly increasing the risk of developing Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), which may lead to blindness. Studies also show that stopping smoking can reduce your risk of developing AMD
- stopping smoking can halt or reverse damage to the eyes, depending on the severity and type of disease. It can also reduce the risk, over time, of developing or exacerbating AMD.