

Astigmatism

Introduction

Astigmatism is a treatable eye condition that can cause blurred vision and headaches.

Most people with astigmatism are born with the condition, although it can develop throughout life. Usually, a person with astigmatism will have other visual problems such as short or long sightedness.

Causes

To focus images, your eye has two parts - the cornea and the lens. When the cornea in the front-part of your eye and the lens inside the eye are a regular symmetrical ball shape, all incoming light is sent the same way to make a sharply focused image in the back of your eye.

Astigmatism occurs when the cornea or lens are shaped more like a rugby ball - longer in one direction than the other. This means that the image at the back of your eye isn't as sharply focused.

Diagnosis

If you have astigmatism, an optometrist or ophthalmic surgeon should carry out a full eye exam to fully assess the extent of the problem.

Once the degree and amount of astigmatism is identified, corrective action can be taken.

Treatment

There are several treatments available, depending on whether astigmatism of the cornea or lens is even and regular.

If the curve is even, glasses and soft contact lenses can be used to counteract the curve. If the curve is irregular and uneven, hard contact lenses can be used to set the cornea into a regular shape. Contact lenses for astigmatism are called toric lenses. Soft lenses will not work for irregular or unevenly curved corneas, as they will mould to the irregular uneven curve of the eye.

There is also a surgical procedure called refractive surgery where your cornea is reshaped by laser or implantable lenses.

Mild astigmatism may not require treatment unless you are constantly putting demands on the eyes through looking at a computer screen or driving. It's wise to discuss your options with an eye specialist to find a treatment that would best suit your lifestyle.

If you have astigmatism or any other eye problems you should get your eyes checked regularly.

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