Smoking can cause lung cancer - but did you know it can cause THIS terrifying condition

THE relationship between smoking and sight loss is as strong as the link between smoking and lung cancer, a charity has warned.

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A smoker is four times more likely to lose their sight than someone who has never smoked, according to charity Eye Health UK.

Chemicals in tobacco smoke trigger biological changes in the eye that can lead to eye disease including age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataracts and thyroid eye disease.

It can also cause poor eye health by contributing to conditions such as dry eye, uveitis and impair colour vision.

Research published in the British Medical Journal reveals one in five cases of AMD, the UK's leading cause of blindness, can be directly attributed to tobacco consumption - equating to around 120,000 cases of AMD across the country.

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Smoking can cause lung cancer: The habit can also cause blindness

"Cigarettes cause blindness yet Britain's seven million smokers are largely unaware of the dangers,” said David Cartwright, chairman of Eye Health UK.

“Fewer than 10 per cent realise smoking can affect their eye health.

“This compares to 92 per cent associating smoking with [lung cancer](http://www.express.co.uk/life-style/health/737361/lung-cancer-symptoms-stage-persistent-cough) and 87 per cent identifying a link between [smoking](http://www.express.co.uk/latest/cancer) and the risk of heart disease.”

He said: "Half of all sight loss in the UK is avoidable and smoking is the single biggest modifiable risk factor.

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Smoking can damage eyes: Nicotine poisoning can make it difficult to distinguish red or green colour

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David Cartwright

“Joining the NHS smoke free programme will improve your eye health and significantly reduce your risk of losing your sight.

“After a decade or so being smoke free your risk of sight loss reduces to that of a non-smoker."

Any amount of smoking, even light, occasional or second-hand can affect eye health and increase your chances of suffering sight-threatening eye diseases, Eye Health UK suggests.

Smoking increases the risk of nuclear cataracts - which form in the centre ‘nucleus' of the lens - three-fold.

The risk of thyroid eye disease - a condition affecting more than 400,000 people in the UK - surges by more than eight times for heavy smokers.

Smoking can cause lung cancer: The habit is also linked to blindness

Smoking cigarettes has also been found to increase the risk of dry eye syndrome - a painful condition characterised by the following symptoms - a sandy-gritty irritation that gets worse as the day goes on, dryness, a burning sensation, itchy, red or tired eyes, and, a feeling that you have some dust in your eye.

Smokers who consume more than 20 cigarettes per day may suffer colour vision defects.

Nicotine poisoning can make it difficult to clearly distinguish colours with a red or green hue.

David Cartwright added: "Having regular sight tests, once every two years unless advised otherwise by your optometrist, is vital for everyone but never more so than for smokers.

“Early detection of conditions such as AMD is essential to prevent avoidable sight loss."

March 8 marks National No Smoking Day.