

REAL SIMPLE

LIFE MADE EASIER

 the guide **HEALTH**



Every day, your body tells you all kinds of things: *Scratch my elbow. I'd like some salt.* But hidden in these signals can be deeper messages about your health. Here's how to decode them.

WHAT YOU CAN LEARN FROM...

the whites of your eyes

If they look grayish: It's probably just a result of the natural aging process, which can make the whites of your eyes (formally known as sclerae) become grayer. "The sclera thins over time, so the deep vascular tissue underneath shows through," says Christopher Coad, an ophthalmologist at Chelsea Eye Associates, in New York City. That said, there are some serious medical conditions that can turn your whites gray, including rheumatoid arthritis and brittle bone syndrome. As a starting point, schedule an exam with your ophthalmologist, who may refer you to a specialist.

If they look red: Most likely, your eyes are dry. Those red squiggles you see are tiny blood vessels, which become more prominent when eyes are irritated. "Dryness can be a result of age, staring at the computer, or environmental factors, like air-conditioning," says Coad. Preservative-free artificial tears (sold at drugstores) help lubricate eyes with ingredients like glycerin and can soothe irritation; use four to six times daily, as needed. If the dryness worsens, see your ophthalmologist, as "dry eyes can be a symptom of conditions like thyroid disease and diabetes," says Coad. If you also have itching and tearing, allergies may be to blame; try an over-the-counter antihistamine.

If they look yellow: It may be jaundice, which is caused by a high level of bilirubin, a by-product of red blood cells. See a doctor right away, as jaundice can be a sign of several serious health problems, including liver dysfunction, hepatitis, and, in rare cases, pancreatic cancer.

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