

Health Notes

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JULY: VISION PRESERVATION

Sight – our most valuable sense, accounts for 80% of learning in the first 12 years of life. Yet, many of us fail to have eye exams, discuss changes in our vision with our healthcare professionals, or practice simple measures to protect our eyes at home, at work or at play. Overall good health is an important part of good vision: the healthier you are, the better chance you have of avoiding risks to your eyes.

In April, 2007, at the National Vision Symposium in Washington DC, Prevent Blindness America released a report estimating the costs associated with adult vision problems in the USA at \$51.4 billion. *The Economic Impact of Vision Problems: The Toll of Major Adult Eye Disorders, Visual Impairment and Blindness in the U.S. Economy* describes the costs to individuals, their caregivers and the nation's economy, caused by vision conditions such as age-related macular degeneration ("AMD"), cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, visual impairment and blindness. It is estimated that 1 million Americans are blind, 3 million more have severe visual limitations, and some 30 million people in the USA are living with some form of major age-related eye disease.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) 2005 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance revealed that an average of 60% of all individuals surveyed in the 50-64 year age group said they did not seek professional eye examinations because they felt they had no reason to go or had not thought of it!

You can lower your risk of eye disease and vision loss if you:

Avoid smoking: may reduce your risk of developing AMD, cataracts, glaucoma, and retinopathy (damage to the retina) in diabetics

Stay active: activity is part of a healthy lifestyle that can improve your overall health, and reduce your risk of developing health problems that lead to eye disease. (Always discuss changes in your exercise habits with your doctor!)

Eat healthy foods: in October 2001, the National Eye Institute released a study showing that people who are at risk of developing advanced AMD benefited from supplements of zinc, vitamins C and E, and beta-carotene (check with your healthcare professional before adding vitamins and minerals to your diet.) Studies have also suggested that a diet rich in certain dark green vegetables such as spinach and kale may reduce your risk of vision loss. By eating healthy foods you also lower your risk of developing other diseases,

such as diabetes and high blood pressure which also contribute to eye disease.

Control your blood pressure: not just good for your heart, it is also a good idea for protecting your eyesight. High blood pressure can increase your risk for glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.

Protect your eyes from the sun: the dangers of ultraviolet ("UV") rays have been widely publicized; yet, many people fail to use eyewear that absorbs UV-A and UV-B rays or wear a wide-brimmed cap or hat (doing this will block about 50% of UV rays!). UV rays contribute to corneal sunburns, macular degeneration, cataracts and even skin cancer around the eyelids. In choosing protective eyewear, select sunglasses that

- reduce glare
 - filter 99-100% of UV-A and UV-B rays
 - do not distort colors
 - are impact-resistant
 - protect your eyes from sun rays at most angles
- (Remember to put sunglasses on your kids and grand-kids, too!)



Talk to your healthcare professional if you notice changes in the appearance of your eyes (e.g., color of the iris, red-rimmed, swollen lids, excess tears or "watery eyes") or vision (e.g., unusual trouble adjusting to darkness, unusual sensitivity to light or glare, double vision, dark spot at the center of viewing, halos or rainbows around light, loss of side vision, distorted or wavy lines and edges, sudden loss of vision in one eye). Even if you have no signs of problems, regular eye exams are recommended in order to detect treatable conditions as early as possible!

Go to www.preventblindness.org for much more information about vision screening, research, common eye problems, and eye safety practices and products.

Established in 1908, Prevent Blindness America is the nation's leading volunteer eye health and safety organization; its mission is simply "to prevent blindness and preserve sight".

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