

Practicing Good Eye Care

More than 12 million Americans over age 40 have vision and eye problems — a number projected to double by 2050 as the millennial generation ages.

However, researchers believe that the risk of developing eye problems can be lessened when people practice good eye care.

Regular Eye Examinations

Many eye diseases can be treated without significant vision loss if they are detected early. Experts recommend that adults visit an eye doctor on a regular basis (every one to three years).

Some eye conditions can be serious and happen fast. Visit your eye doctor right away if you have any of the following problems:

- Any sudden change in vision
- Blurry vision that doesn't go away
- Eye pain
- Eye drainage or redness
- Double vision
- New floaters (tiny specks that appear to float before your eyes) and/or sudden flashes of light
- Circles (halos) around light sources
- A curtain-like shadow in one eye

Diet

A good diet is as important for eye health as it is for the health of the rest of the body. According to the Age-Related Eye Diseases Study (AREDS), foods rich in vitamins C and E, zinc, lutein, zeaxanthin, and omega-3 fatty acids DHA and EPA are good for eye health as well as general health.

These nutrients are linked to lower risk for age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataract and dry eye later in life.

Some examples of eye-healthy food choices include citrus fruits, vegetable oils, nuts, whole grains, dark green leafy vegetables and cold water fish.

People who have diabetes or AMD or are at risk for eye diseases can also benefit by following a low-glycemic (low-GI) index diet.

Sun Protection

Harmful exposure to ultraviolet light from the sun raises the risks of eye diseases, including cataract, growths on the eye and cancer. Strong exposure to light reflecting off of snow can also cause painful damage called snow blindness.

Consider following these tips to protect your eyes from the sun all year round:

- Wear well-fitting sunglasses that absorb 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B rays.
- Hats with wide brims can also help shade the eyes another 30 to 50 percent.
- Sun damage to eyes can occur anytime during the year, not just in the summertime, so be sure to wear UV-blocking sunglasses and broad-brimmed hats whenever you are outside.
- The sun's rays can pass through haze and thin clouds, so make sure to wear protective eye gear even on cloudy days.

Computer and Digital Device Use

Staring at computer screens, smartphones or other digital devices can cause eyes to feel dry and tired. You can also develop blurry vision, fatigue or eye strain. There are even some instances of people experiencing headaches or motion sickness.

Humans typically blink about 15 times of minute. However, studies show that we blink roughly half to a third that often while using digital screen devices.

Consider following these eye ergonomics tips to reduce eye strain caused by digital devices:

- Sit about 25 inches, or arm's length, from the computer screen. Position the screen so your eye gaze is slightly downward.
- Many devices now have glass screens with considerable glare. Reduce glare by using a matte screen filter if needed.
- Take regular breaks using the "20-20-20" rule: every 20 minutes, shift your eyes to look at an object at least 20 feet away, for at least 20 seconds.
- Use artificial tears to refresh your eyes when they feel dry. Consider using a humidifier.
- If a screen is much brighter than the surrounding light, your eyes have to work harder to see. Adjust your room lighting and try increasing the contrast on your screen to reduce eye strain.

Eye Injuries at Work

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) about 2,000 U.S. workers sustain job-related eye injuries that require medical treatment every day. However, safety experts and eye doctors believe the right eye protection can lessen the severity or even prevent 90 percent of these eye injuries

Common causes for eye injuries include:

- Flying objects (bits of metal, glass)
- Tools
- Particles
- Chemicals
- Any combination of these or other hazards.

Three things you can do to help prevent an eye injury include:

1. Know the eye safety dangers at work.
2. Eliminate hazards before starting work. Use machine guarding, work screens or other engineering controls.
3. Use proper eye protection.

Resting

The eyes and eye muscles need rest just like any other body part. As we sleep, our eyes enjoy continuous lubrication. During sleep the eyes also clear out irritants such as dust, allergens or smoke that may have accumulated during the day. Thus, it is important to get a good amount of sleep.

While it is important that we protect our eyes from overexposure to UV light, our eyes also need minimal exposure to natural light every day to help maintain normal sleep-wake cycles. Additionally, people who wear contacts should avoid sleeping with them in their eyes, even if the packaging indicates it is safe.

Resources

- American Academy of Ophthalmology: www.aao.org
- American Optometric Association (AOA): www.aoa.org
- Centers for Disease Control: www.cdc.gov
- National Institutes of Health: www.nih.gov

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