

The Secret to Healthy Eyes

Those beautiful blue, brown or green eyes impact more than just how you see. They are crucial in everything you do throughout the course of your day.

Keeping them healthy is a collaborative process that involves you, your employer and your medical professionals. It requires due diligence by you to identify if there is an upcoming problem with your vision, as you will be responsible for reaching out for medical help.

GET AN EXAM

The best way to take stock of your eye health is to schedule a comprehensive dilated eye exam – even if you think your eyes are completely healthy. Some people do not realize that their vision could be aided by glasses or contact lenses.

Also, many common eye diseases often have no obvious warning signs. A dilated eye exam can uncover these issues early on and lead to the necessary treatments.

There is no reason to fear an eye exam, which begins with your eye care professional placing drops in your eyes to dilate the pupil and allow more light to enter. This enables a clear view of the back of the eyes to spot any signs of damage or disease.

HEALTHY HABITS

Did you know that what you eat can have a major impact on your eyes? A diet rich in fruits and vegetables is important for keeping your eyes healthy. Dark, leafy greens such as spinach, kale and collard greens are particularly vital, as are fish high in omega-3 fatty acids.

Maintaining a healthy weight also is important when it comes to protecting your eyes. Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic conditions, according to the National Eye Institute.

Especially if your profession has certain inherent dangers, you should consider wearing protective eyewear at all times. This also is true even if you play a lot of sports or spend time outdoors operating lawn mowers or grass trimmers. You can find this eyewear at eye care providers or sporting goods stores.



Macular Degeneration

Age-related macular degeneration is defined as the deterioration of the eye's macula – the part of the retina responsible for your central vision.

In many cases, the disease will have a minimal impact on your vision. In fact, even people with advanced cases may continue to have useful vision using their peripheral sight.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

Macular degeneration is traced to the formation of deposits under the retina, and in some cases, the growth of abnormal blood vessels under the retina. Many older people develop the condition as part of the body's natural aging process. Signs and symptoms include blurriness, dark areas or distortion in your central vision and permanent loss of central vision.

TYPES

Most people who have macular degeneration have the dry form, which is caused by the aging and thinning of the macula tissues. Vision loss associated with this variety is usually gradual, and people who develop it are urged by professionals to closely monitor the quality of their central vision.

About 10 percent of people with macular degeneration have the wet form, according to the Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology. This occurs when abnormal blood vessels begin to grow under the retina and leak fluid or blood, which can blur your central vision.

OTHER FACTS

The Foundation of the American Academy of Ophthalmology offers the following facts to help further explain macular degeneration:

- With or without treatment, macular degeneration alone almost never causes total blindness.
- When macular degeneration does lead to loss of vision, it usually begins in just one eye, though it may affect the other eye later.
- Many people are not aware that they have macular degeneration until they have a noticeable vision problem or until it is detected during an eye examination.



Computer Use & Eye Strain

In this day and age, we are tethered to our computers, laptops, smartphones and mobile devices. These are great inventions for our work productivity and entertainment, but what about our eyes?

Staring at a screen for long periods of time can make your eyes feel dry and tired, while also giving you headaches or motion sickness. And while not proven to cause permanent eye damage, spending too much time on your computer can certainly have a daily impact on your eye health.

WHY IS IT BAD?

Too much screen time – whether for work or play – probably means you’re not sleeping enough. When you get less sleep than you need, your eyes may become irritated and dry because they aren’t being replenished by vital nutrients.

So for a marathon work or play session on your computer, the American Academy of Ophthalmology offers these tips for healthy habits:

- Sit about 25 inches from the computer screen and position the screen so your eye gaze is slightly downward.

- Reduce glare from the screen by lighting the area properly; use a screen filter if needed.

- Post a note that says “Blink!” on the computer as a reminder.

- Every 20 minutes, shift your eyes to look at an object at least 20 feet away, for at

least 20 seconds: the “20-20-20” rule.

- Use artificial tears to refresh your eyes when they feel dry.

- Take regular breaks from computer work, and try to get enough sleep at night.

- If you have to be at your computer for a marathon

work session, take regular rest breaks or “power naps,” if possible.

- Apply a washcloth soaked in warm water to tired, dry

eyes (with eyes closed).

- Use tired or sore eyes as a signal that it’s time to stop working and get some rest or sleep.

