

# Keep an Eye on Your Vision



Americans agree that eyesight has a huge impact on day-to-day living and is one of the senses they fear losing most. Unfortunately, people often do not pay attention to their eye health unless they notice a problem. Many common eye diseases that can lead to vision loss and blindness, such as diabetic eye disease, glaucoma, or age-related macular degeneration (AMD), often have no early warning signs or symptoms. Having regular eye exams to make sure the eyes are healthy and seeing

their best is important for everyone. However, the risk of vision loss and blindness is higher for some people based on race, ethnicity, and other demographic and socioeconomic factors.

You might be at higher risk for eye disease if you have a family history of eye disease; have diabetes; are African American, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, or Alaska Native; or are older than 50. Some diseases affect certain populations disproportionately.

- Glaucoma, which affects your side or peripheral vision first, is three times more common in African Americans than in Whites. It is a leading cause of blindness in African Americans.
- Diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of blindness caused by uncontrolled diabetes, occurs more often in Hispanics/Latinos than in Whites.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives are 35 percent more likely to have diabetes than the average adult in the United States, putting them at increased risk of diabetic eye disease.
- Older adults are at higher risk of developing age-related eye diseases and conditions such as AMD, glaucoma, or cataract. AMD is a leading cause of blindness in Whites.

"If you are at higher risk of eye disease, having a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the best thing you can do to protect your vision," says Paul A. Sieving, M.D., Ph.D., director of the National Eye Institute, part of the National Institutes of Health.

"A comprehensive dilated eye exam is a painless procedure where your eye care professional puts drops in the eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupil so he or she can get a good look at the back of the eye to check for signs of eye disease. With early detection, treatment can slow or stop vision loss and reduce the risk of blindness."



In addition to having regular eye exams, eating a healthy diet, not smoking, and wearing protective eyewear are just a few other things you can do to protect your sight. For more information on eye exams, common eye diseases and conditions, and finding financial assistance for eye care, visit <http://www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes>. Remember, when you take good care of your eyes, you take good care of yourself.