

Healthy Vision: Make It Last a Lifetime



Imagine for a moment that you lost your ability to see—not all at once, but gradually. Watching your favorite TV shows, curling up to read a good book, or taking in the scenic countryside on a weekend drive would no longer be the same.

Americans agree that eyesight has a huge impact on their day-to-day lives and is one of the senses they fear losing most. However, people often do not pay attention to their vision unless they notice a problem. Many eye diseases and conditions have no early warning signs, so a person can have a potentially blinding eye disease and not even know it.

One of the most important things you can do to protect your vision is to get a comprehensive dilated eye exam. In this procedure, an eye care professional places drops in your eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupil to allow more light to enter the eye the same way an open door lets more light into a room. This allows your eye care professional to examine the back of the eyes for any signs of eye disease. Early detection and treatment can help to reduce your risk of vision loss and blindness.

“Diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, and age-related macular degeneration [AMD] affect millions of Americans,” says Dr. Sieving, director of the National Eye Institute (NEI) of the National Institutes of Health. “These conditions were once untreatable, robbing people of their vision, mobility, and independence. Thankfully, in the last decade, medical researchers have developed highly effective, sight-saving treatments. However, these treatments are only effective if the disease is diagnosed before it causes vision loss. Since there are often no warning signs, regular dilated eye exams are important to early detection and treatment.”

Talking to your family members about their eye health history is also important, as many eye diseases and conditions are hereditary. Make sure you pass on your history to the next generation so they can take care of their vision, too. And, tell your eye care professional if anyone in your family has an eye disease or condition.

Other simple steps to keep your vision at its best include the following:

- Make healthy food choices—A variety of vegetables, especially dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, or collard greens, should be an important part of your diet. Researchers have found that people with diets that contain higher levels of vitamins C and E, zinc, and omega-3 fatty acids (found in salmon, tuna, and halibut) are less likely to develop AMD.
- Quit smoking or never start—Tobacco smoking has been linked to an increased risk of AMD, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to vision loss.
- Wear sunglasses—Sunglasses can help to protect your eyes from harmful ultraviolet rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation.

For more information about eye health and tips for finding an eye care professional or organizations that provide financial assistance for eye care, visit <http://www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes>.

