

# Healthy Vision: Make It Last a Lifetime



Picture this—the sights and sounds of family and friends enjoying a fiesta, cooking your favorite traditional dishes, and your beautiful niece as she celebrates her quinceañera party. Now imagine not being able to see those images the same way ever again.

Americans agree that eyesight has a huge impact on their day-to-day lives and is the sense 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.

Research funded by the National Eye Institute (NEI) found that Latinos have higher incidence rates of visual impairment, blindness, and diabetic eye disease than non-Hispanic Whites. Diabetic eye disease is a group of eye problems that includes glaucoma, cataract, and diabetic retinopathy. The same studies showed that more than 60 percent of eye disease in Hispanics/Latinos remains undiagnosed.

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 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 eye protection—If you play sports or work on home projects, it is critical to wear appropriate eye protection to prevent eye injuries.

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>.

