

See well for a lifetime.



Take Care of Your Eyes and Continue Looking Forward to the Future

Aging is a process that brings about many opportunities and changes, from major transformations such as becoming a grandparent or going back to school, to simple lifestyle changes like starting a new exercise program. Don't miss out on any of these opportunities. Take stock of your eye health to make sure your eyes are healthy and you are seeing your best.

While vision loss and blindness are not a normal part of aging, some vision changes such as losing focus, having trouble distinguishing between colors such as blue and black, and needing more light to see well are common. These changes can often be corrected with contact lenses or glasses and improved lighting.

People are also at higher risk for vision loss from certain eye diseases and conditions as they age, including the following:

- Age-related macular degeneration (AMD), which gradually destroys the macula (the part of the eye that provides sharp, central vision)
- Cataract, a clouding of the lens in the eye
- Diabetic retinopathy, a complication of diabetes that damages blood vessels in the retina (the light-sensitive tissue at the back of the eye)
- Glaucoma, a group of diseases that can cause fluid and pressure to build up in the eye and damage the optic nerve
- Low vision, a visual impairment that cannot be corrected by regular glasses, contact lenses, medication, or surgery that interferes with the ability to perform everyday activities
- Dry eye, a condition that occurs when the eye does not produce tears properly or when tears evaporate too quickly

There are many things you can do to reduce your risk of vision loss from eye disease and make sure your eyes are healthy. Follow these simple steps to continue to look forward to the future.



HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE DILATED EYE EXAM. You might think your vision is fine or that your eyes are healthy, but getting a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the only way to really be sure. During this exam, your 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 dark room. This enables your eye care professional to get a good look at the back of your eyes and examine them for any signs of damage or disease. Your eye care professional can also let you know if your vision can benefit from glasses or contact lenses.



KNOW YOUR RISK FACTORS. As you get older, you are at higher risk of developing age-related eye diseases and conditions such as AMD, cataract, diabetic eye disease, dry eye, and glaucoma. Having a family history of eye disease also puts you at higher risk. And being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic conditions that can lead to vision loss. If you are having trouble maintaining a healthy weight, talk to your doctor.



EAT RIGHT TO PROTECT YOUR SIGHT. You've heard carrots are good for your eyes, but eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables—particularly dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, or collard greens—is important for keeping your eyes healthy, too. Research has also shown that there are eye health benefits from eating fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and halibut. A healthy diet can also help you maintain a healthy weight, which can help protect your vision.



WEAR YOUR SHADES AND A BRIMMED HAT. Sunglasses and a brimmed hat are great fashion accessories, but their most important job is to protect your eyes from the sun's harmful rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation. Prolonged sun exposure is associated with developing AMD and cataract.



DON'T SMOKE. Smoking is as bad for your eyes as it is for the rest of your body. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing AMD, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to vision loss and blindness.



USE PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR. Wear protective eyewear such as goggles, safety glasses, face shields, and eye guards when playing sports or doing activities around the home and encourage your family and friends to do the same. Most protective eyewear lenses are made of polycarbonate, which is 10 times stronger than other plastics. Many eye care providers sell protective eyewear, as do some sporting goods stores.

The National Eye Institute (NEI), one of the National Institutes of Health and the federal government's principal agency for vision research, offers additional eye health information and tips for people to protect their vision as they age. Visit www.nei.nih.gov/agingeye.