

## It's Time To See The Importance Of Eye Health



**You may barely notice the changes at first.** Maybe you've found yourself reaching more often for your glasses to see up close. You might have trouble adjusting to glaring lights or reading when the light is dim. You may even have put on blue socks thinking they were black. These are some of the normal changes to your eyes and vision as you age.

As more Americans head toward retirement and beyond, scientists expect the number of people with age-related eye problems to rise dramatically. You can't prevent all age-related changes to your eyes. But you can take steps to protect your vision and reduce your risk for serious eye disease in the future. Effective treatments are now available for many disorders that may lead to blindness or visual impairment. You can also learn how to make the most of the vision you have.

### Signs Of Eye Aging

The clear, curved lens at the front of your eye may be one of the first parts of your eyes to show signs of age. The lens bends to focus light and form images on the retina at the back of your eye. This flexibility lets you see at different distances—up close or far away. But the lens hardens with age. The change may begin as early as your 20s, but it can come so gradually it may take decades to notice.

Eventually, age-related stiffening and clouding of the lens affects just about everyone. You'll have trouble focusing on up-close objects, a condition called presbyopia. Anyone over age 35 is at risk for presbyopia.

Cloudy areas in the lens, called cataracts, are another common eye problem that comes with age. More than 22 million Americans have cataracts. By age 80, more than half of us will have had them. Some cataracts stay small and have little effect on eyesight, but others become large and interfere with vision. Symptoms include:

- Blurriness
- Difficulty seeing well at night
- Lights that seem too bright
- Faded color vision

There are no specific steps to prevent cataracts, but tobacco use and exposure to sunlight raise your risk of developing them. Cataract surgery is a safe and common treatment that can restore good vision.

The passage of time can also weaken the tiny muscles that control your eye's pupil size. The pupil becomes smaller and less responsive to changes in light. That's why people in their 60s need three times more light for comfortable reading than those in their 20s. Smaller pupils make it more difficult to see at night.

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### Think You Don't Need An Eye Exam? Think Again!

If you're not convinced you should have regular eye exams, consider that some of the more serious age-related eye diseases—like glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and diabetic eye disease—may have no warning signs or symptoms in their early stages.

### A Quick Look At Eye Diseases

#### Glaucoma

Glaucoma comes from increased fluid pressure inside the eye that damages the optic nerve. Glaucoma can slowly steal your peripheral vision. You may not notice it until it's advanced. It can be treated with prescription eye drops, lasers or surgery. If not treated, however, it can lead to vision loss and blindness.

#### Age-Related Macular Degeneration

AMD causes gradual loss of vision in the center of your eyesight and is the leading cause of blindness in Americans over age 65. Scientists have found that people who eat diets rich in green, leafy vegetables—such as kale and spinach—or fish are less likely to have advanced AMD.

#### Diabetic Eye Disease

Diabetic eye disease, another leading cause of blindness, can damage the tiny blood vessels inside the retina. Keeping your blood sugar under control can help prevent or slow the problem.

The only way to detect these serious eye diseases before they cause vision loss or blindness is through a comprehensive dilated eye exam. Your eye care professional will put drops in your eyes to enlarge, or dilate, the pupils and then look for signs of disease. Having regular comprehensive eye care gives your doctor a chance to identify a problem very early on and then treat it. Annual eye exams are especially important if you have diabetes.

### Protect Your Vision

- Have a comprehensive eye exam each year after age 50.
- Stop smoking.
- Eat a diet rich in green, leafy vegetables and fish.
- Exercise.
- Maintain normal blood pressure.
- Control diabetes if you have it.
- Wear sunglasses and a brimmed hat any time you're outside in bright sunshine.
- Wear protective eyewear when playing sports or doing work around the house that may cause eye injury.

