

Caregiver Assistance News

“CARING FOR YOU...CARING FOR OTHERS”

Vision Loss in Aging

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines visual impairment as the condition when “a person’s eyesight cannot be corrected to a ‘normal’ level.”

While vision loss can occur at any age, it occurs most often among seniors. A diagnosis of vision can cause shock, grief, anger, anxiety and depression. These feelings may be temporary or last for years. Loss of vision means losing the ability to drive, which is the loss of independence.

Over time, most people with vision loss become more confident about living with reduced sight. This confidence will increase if they participate in rehabilitation training. They will begin to trust their new skills and feel better about the future.

Contact your state’s Commission for the Blind for information on self-help organizations for those with low vision. Seek out radio stations that have programs of newspaper readings. People with severe vision loss should be encouraged to consider these resources.



Diabetes and Your Eyes

Diabetic retinopathy is also one of the most *preventable* causes of vision loss and blindness. Early detection and treatment can prevent or delay blindness due to diabetic retinopathy in 90% of people with diabetes, but 50% or more of them don’t get their eyes examined or are diagnosed too late for effective treatment.

People with diabetes are also at higher risk for other eye diseases, including glaucoma and cataracts. If you have diabetes, an eye exam every year is necessary to protect and preserve your eyesight and eye health.

Safety Tip – Avoid Mistaken Identity

Keep cleaning supplies separate from food storage areas. Use markers to print large labels for everyday items as cleaning or cooking supplies.

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Common Eye Conditions in Seniors

Macular Degeneration – The most common cause of severe, irreversible *vision loss*. This disease is characterized by vision loss in the center of eye; blurred vision; straight lines looking wavy; needing more light to see. It can affect either one or both eyes.

Glaucoma – The leading cause of *blindness* in the United States. It is characterized by gradual loss of peripheral (side) vision; difficulty driving at night; loss of contrast. It is important to get treatment for early symptoms to prevent total blindness.

Cataracts – Causes clouding of the normally clear lens of the eye. It is the leading cause of vision loss in the U.S. Its symptoms are hazy vision; difficulty driving at night; double vision; trouble distinguishing colors; sensitivity to glare. It typically develops gradually. Through surgery, cataracts can be removed and the lens of the eye replaced by a plastic lens.

Diabetic Retinopathy – Typically occurs in people with advanced diabetes and high blood sugar levels. It is caused by leaking blood vessels. Its symptoms are blurred or changing vision; difficulty reading; floaters that affect either central or peripheral vision. Estimates are that 25 percent of people with diabetes have some diabetic retinopathy, but *few* people develop severe vision problems. There are often no symptoms in the early stages, so people with advanced diabetes should have regular vision exams. The best prevention is maintaining stable blood sugar levels.

A doctor should be seen immediately if a person has any acute or prolonged episodes like blurred vision, flashes of light, blind spots or any other symptom that affects vision.

Source: National Eye Institute; American Academy of Ophthalmology; WebMD.com

Focus on Fall Prevention

Every second of every day in the U.S an older adult falls, making falls the number one cause of injuries and deaths from injury among older Americans.

An 85-year-old needs about three times the amount of light a 15-year-old needs to see the same thing. Increase lighting levels in the home to aid vision. Use motion-sensitive lights that come on when a person enters a room or use night lights in every room. Contrasting colors play a big part in seeing well. As much as possible, the color of furniture, toilet seats, counters, etc., should be different from the floor color.

Remove all hazards that might lead to tripping such as loose cords and slippery rugs. Remove only *unnecessary* furniture. Some frail seniors hold onto furniture while moving through the home. Until canes or walkers are introduced, keep everything securely in place.

Source: CDC

Taking Care of Yourself—Checkups for Eye Health

The American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that adults with **no signs or risk factors** for eye disease get a baseline eye disease screening at age 40—the time when early signs of disease and changes in vision may start to occur. Based on the results of the initial screening, an ophthalmologist (specialist in eye diseases) will prescribe the necessary intervals for follow-up exams. For individuals **at any age with symptoms** or risk of

eye disease, such as those with a family history of eye disease, diabetes

or high blood pressure, the Academy recommends that individuals see their ophthalmologist to determine how frequently their eyes should be examined. EyeCare America, is a leading public service program that provides eye care through volunteer ophthalmologists. Ninety percent of the care provided is at no out-of-pocket cost to eligible patients. For details, visit www.aaopt.org/eyecare-america.

Source: THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF OPHTHALMOLOGY



TIP

Remember that pointing, nodding your head or using other *body language* will not be effective communication with someone who cannot see clearly.

Live Life Laughing!

I sure am glad I didn't get a Chihuahua seeing-eye dog!



Inspiration

*The early bird may get the worm,
but the second mouse gets the
cheese.*

Memory Care

A person with Alzheimer's should have regular eye examinations because poor vision can contribute to confusion. Tell the doctor of any medicines taken and if there is a family history of glaucoma.

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SAFETY TIPS— Aids for Daily Living

Non-optical aids are also helpful in daily activities. These devices “talk” to you, or offer enlarged print or Braille. Many also have special features, such as high contrast, that make them easier to see. Some popular non-optical devices include:

- Text reading software
- Braille readers
- High contrast and “talking” clocks and watches
- Large-print publications

A new technology is portable tablet, called Blitab, designed for blind and visually impaired people. The “smart” liquid alters the surface of the tablet to convert text, maps and graphics into Braille, by creating a rising sensation under the user’s fingertips.

Low vision clinics and agencies are available in many locations, which can help people choose the most helpful vision aids and services for their personal visual problem.

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“ C A R I N G F O R Y O U ... C A R I N G F O R O T H E R S ”

Q U I C K Q U I Z

Vision loss can reduce independence and take the joy out of living for seniors and their family caregivers. Test your knowledge by reading this issue and answering True or False to the questions below.

1. The best prevention of diabetic retinopathy is maintaining stable blood sugar levels.
T F
2. Macular degeneration is the most common cause of severe, irreversible *vision loss*.
T F
3. While vision loss can occur at any age, it occurs most often among seniors.
T F
4. Estimates are that 25 percent of people with diabetes have some diabetic retinopathy, and they *all* will develop severe vision problems.
T F
5. Symptoms of cataracts are hazy vision; difficulty driving at night; double vision; trouble distinguishing colors; sensitivity to glare.
T F
6. Glaucoma is the leading cause of *blindness* in the United States.
T F
7. An 85-year-old needs about three times the amount of light a 15-year-old needs to see the same thing.
T F
8. A person with Alzheimer’s disease should have regular eye examinations because poor vision can contribute to confusion.
T F
9. A doctor should be seen immediately if a person has any acute or prolonged episodes like blurred vision, flashes of light, blind spots or any other symptom that affects vision.
T F
10. Adults with no signs or risk factors for eye disease should get a baseline eye disease screening at age 40—the time when early signs of disease and changes in vision may start to occur.
T F

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____