Think for a moment about how often we use our sight every day. Our vision allows us to admire nature’s beauty around us, enjoy a good book, and appreciate the faces of our loved ones. Vision is so important in our daily life, in fact, according to the American Optometric Association’s (AOA) annual American Eye-Q® survey, 40 percent of Americans worry about losing their eyesight over their ability to walk or hear.\(^1\) However, despite eyesight being among our most treasured of senses, we don't often take the steps needed to maintain our eye health throughout our lives.

There are six easy ways to ensure you are routinely on the right path to maintaining good eye
health and protecting your vision.

1. See your eye doctor regularly. When you are seeing well, or not having a noticeable visual impairment, it's easy to forget about making an appointment to see your eye doctor. Eye exams are not just for people experiencing changes in their visual acuity. An eye exam is an essential way to detect even the slightest changes to your eye health and, it can also detect other systemic health issues, such as glaucoma and diabetes, before there are any symptoms. If you presently wear corrective lenses, you should prepare for your office visit by bringing your current lens prescription or eye glasses, if available. Regardless of whether you currently have a vision correction issue, you should always bring your family's complete health history.

Often, patients don't realize the connection between a larger systemic illness within the body and eye health. Alerting your doctor to any potential issues can help guide your doctor to the right course of action during your exam.

Eye care should begin at an early age, and should be part of your normal health routine throughout your lifetime. Our Recommended Eye Exam Schedule by Patient Age, offers guidance on scheduling your eye exams.

2. Protect your eyes. It's important to protect your eyes from the environment. Most homes and offices have very dry air which can cause eye dryness and irritation. Using a humidifier to control air quality and lubricating eye drops are great options to help protect your ocular surface from irritation and dryness.

The sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays can also be harmful to your eyes. In fact, a lifetime of UV light exposure can increase your risk of cataracts and macular degeneration. Protect your eyes as you would your skin by wearing sunglasses with 100 percent AVA and AVB protection. By the time you have reached 18 years of age, you have received 80 percent of your lifetime exposure, which is why it is also critically important to take these same sunglass precautions with children. Practice eye safety by using protective eyewear while playing sports or working with hazardous materials. This will help to protect and shield your eyes.

3. Eat well to protect your eyesight. While we have all heard that eating carrots are good for your eyes, there are other food options that do a much better job of protecting your eyesight. Studies have shown that antioxidants and nutrients that are linked to a lower risk of common eye conditions include lutein, omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins C and E.

By regularly eating these foods that are rich in protective nutrients and antioxidants you can help maintain good eye health and potentially prevent some troubling eye conditions such as
macular degeneration and glaucoma. 3

- Leafy greens such as spinach and kale 2, 3, 4, 5
- Cold-water fish like salmon, tuna and other oily fish 2, 3, 4, 5
- Nuts, beans, eggs and other non-meat proteins such as soy 3, 5
- Dark pigment fruits such as blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, cherries and grapes 2, 3
- Citrus fruits and juices 5
- Avocados 3
- Broccoli 3
- Tea 3

4. Using computers? Follow the 20-20-20 rule. Staring at your computer or other digital devices can cause major strain on your eyes and can also cause dry eyes, blurry vision, and headaches. 5 To help combat these issues, simply rest your eyes every 20 minutes by looking 20 feet in front of you for 20 seconds. 2, 4, 5

5. Say NO to smoking. Smoking makes you more susceptible to developing macular degeneration, progresses the development of cataracts and can cause optic nerve damage. 4 If you currently smoke, engage in a smoking cessation program to quit. 5

6. Taking care of your overall health protects your eyes too. You know the importance of a healthy diet and the affect it has on your eye health. But did you know that exercise can also help by increasing circulation, which can lower pressure in the eyes? 7 This can help those with glaucoma - a group of diseases caused by an increase in intraocular pressure (IOP), or pressure inside the eye. 8

Exercise also helps maintain a healthy weight. Being overweight increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic diseases, increasing your chance of major eye diseases. If you are having trouble maintaining a healthy weight or reaching your weight goals, talk to your doctor. 4 Always check with your doctor before starting an exercise program.

Disclaimer:

References

1. The eighth annual American Eye-Q® survey was created and commissioned in conjunction with Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates (PSB). From March 15-18, 2013 using an online methodology, PSB interviewed 1,000 Americans 18 years and older who embodied a nationally representative sample of U.S. general population. (Margin of error at 95 percent confidence level)

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