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ADULT HEALTH BULLETIN

APRIL 2009

THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

VISION LOSS IN OLDER ADULTS

Being able to see clearly is something many of us take for granted, until we notice a problem. We depend on our sight more than any other sense. As we age, changes in our vision will occur naturally.

Changes in eyesight that occur with age:

- The need for more light to see clearly
- Some colors may begin to look alike (i.e. blue and green)
- It becomes harder to see close up
- It may take the eyes longer to adjust to glare or poorly lit areas

Not surprisingly, vision loss is a major health concern for older adults. Because of poor vision, older adults may struggle with daily tasks like reading small print, being able to clearly see road signs, threading a needle, or adapting to sudden changes in light.

There are a number of different causes for vision loss as we age. Some can be controlled and some cannot.

Common Causes of Vision Loss in the Elderly:

- Genetics (some conditions may run in families)

- Environmental (workplace hazards, ultra violet rays from sunlight, medications)
- Complications from other health issues such as high blood pressure and/or diabetes

Age-Related Conditions that Affect Vision:

CATARACTS

A clouding of the lens to the point that light cannot enter the eye or is scattered causing hazy vision. Cataracts are a common cause of vision impairment and blindness in the United States. Symptoms include blurred vision or an annoying glare that won't go away. Cataract surgery is an option when the lens becomes so cloudy (opaque) that vision is severely limited. Cataract surgery is the most common surgical procedure covered by Medicare.

GLAUCOMA

A group of diseases that cause normal fluid pressure inside of the eye to rise. When eye pressure reaches

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Cataracts are a common cause of vision impairment and blindness in the United States.



dangerously high levels, damage is caused to the eye's optic nerve (connects the retina to the brain). Glaucoma is the most common cause of blindness in African Americans. Individuals with glaucoma may have tunnel vision: they can see objects clearly in front of them, but objects to the side (peripheral) begin to fade away. Early detection and treatment of glaucoma is the best way to protect vision. The earlier treatment is begun the easier it is to control vision loss.

AGE-RELATED MACULAR DEGENERATION (AMD)

The leading cause of vision loss in older adults over 65 years of age. AMD gradually destroys vision in the center of the eye. A person with AMD may only see a grey shadow or have a blind spot in the center of their vision but their peripheral (side vision) remains clear. Total blindness rarely occurs but reading and driving will become almost impossible. Although there is no cure for AMD, current treatments can slow retinal damage and improve central vision.

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY

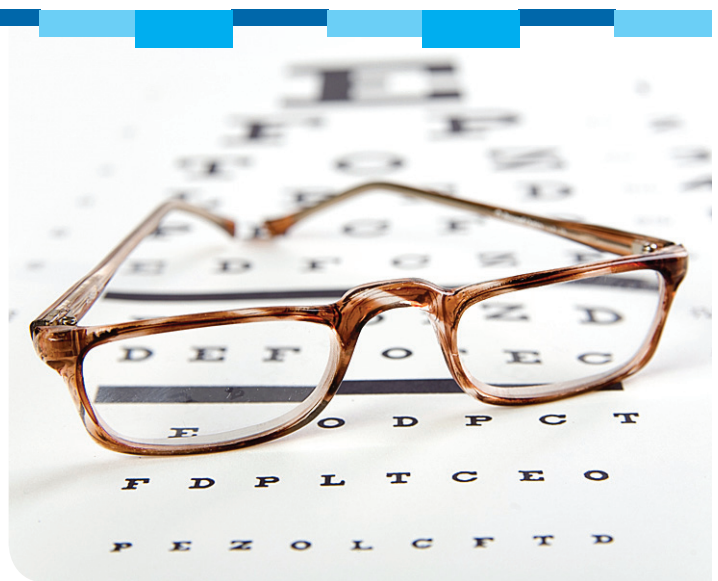
The leading cause of blindness in the United States and the most common eye disease among diabetics. Diabetic retinopathy causes the blood vessels of the eye to swell and leak. Symptoms include: blurred vision, floaters, and poor night vision. Early detection and treatment is the key to preventing permanent vision damage.

Maintain and protect your vision by:

- Adopting a healthy diet

Scientists have found that a diet that is high in antioxidants lutein, zeaxanthin, vitamin E, and vitamin A may help to prevent cataracts and promote good vision. Foods that are high in lutein, zeaxanthin, and vitamin A include: leafy green vegetables (spinach, kale, turnip greens, collards, and mustard greens), squash, green peas, broccoli, pumpkin, corn, carrots, liver, fish oil, and eggs. Vitamin E can be found in nuts, seeds, whole grains, and leafy green vegetables.

- Exercising and staying active
- Controlling your blood pressure, diabetes, and other health problems
- Having your cholesterol levels checked regularly
- Not smoking
- Wearing sunglasses that provide ultraviolet ray protection and hats with a brim to protect your eyes from the sun
- Wearing safety eyewear when playing sports, at the workplace, or while doing home repairs or projects



A checklist for your next eye appointment:

- Ask if you will be able to drive yourself home
- Make a list of eye problems you have noticed (EX double vision, poor night vision, etc.) before your visit
- Make a list of eye problems that run in your family
- Update your current health conditions (EX allergies, diabetes, heart disease, etc.)
- If you wear glasses or contacts, take them with you to your appointment
- Take your prescription and over-the-counter medications with you
- If you don't understand a procedure or explanation, ask questions
- Ask if there have been changes in your eyes since your last exam
- Schedule your next eye exam before you leave

SOURCES:

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