

VISION OVER 60

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Preserve Sight through your Golden Years with Knowledge, Prevention and Awareness



Of all our five senses, vision is regarded by many as the most valuable. According to a study by the American Optometric Association (AOA), almost fifty percent (50%) chose eyesight as the sense they most worry about losing. Besides being valuable, our eyes are highly vulnerable to weakness and disease, especially as we reach age 60 and beyond. One in six Americans over age 70 has a visual impairment, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The first and foremost weapon of defense against all of these threats is an eye exam.

Normal Aging Changes

Below are some of the changes you may experience as your eyes and body mature:

- **Presbyopia:** Presbyopia is prevalent in the over-60 population and approximately 1 in 11 Americans will experience some degree of it, even those with no prior vision problems. Usually emerging during a person's forties, this harmless condition is characterized by a waning ability of the eyes to adjust their focus on close objects. Blurred near vision when reading and working at the computer is a common symptom. Vision correction for presbyopia is typically conservative and includes eyeglasses or contact lenses with bifocal, trifocal or progressive lenses.
- **Vitreous detachment:** When tiny pieces of the eye's gel-like substance break loose within the rear of the eye, spots known as floaters typically appear or "float" across our field of vision. These are usually perfectly harmless. Be aware however of a rapid or sudden onset of floaters with flashes of light, especially if you have diabetes. Those symptoms could be a warning sign of a detached retina.
- **Reduced pupil size:** Because of a reduction in eye muscle strength, older eyes may struggle with reacting and adapting to light, like when reading or exiting a dimly lit movie theater. Add more light when needed and ask your eye care professional about photochromic lenses and anti-reflective coatings so your eyes can adjust more comfortably.
- **Dry eyes:** Over-the-counter artificial tears and prescription dry eye medications can provide comfort for the burning, stinging, and dryness that decreased tear production can cause.
- **Declining peripheral vision:** Because a shrinking visual field increases the risk of automobile accidents, be extra cautious when driving, especially while entering intersections where knowing what's in the periphery is critical. For improved night driving, ask your eye care professional about anti-reflective coatings. Avoid any type of eyeglasses with wide frames or temples that could interfere with your peripheral field perception.

Eye Disease

More than 43 million Americans will develop age-related eye diseases by 2020, according to The American Academy of Ophthalmology. Everyone over 60 has some degree of risk, especially diabetics over 60, of which there are 12.2 million, plus countless undiagnosed. Below are the main age-related eye diseases, all of which can cause permanent vision loss if left untreated:

The importance of the annual eye exam cannot be overstated. It can save your vision and improve your quality of life.

- **Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD):** AMD is the leading cause of blindness among American seniors. A painless disease, AMD destroys the macula within the eye. The usual result is blurred central vision and a disrupted ability to see detail, color, and even recognize faces. There are two forms of the disease: wet and dry. Treatments for “wet” AMD range from laser surgery, photodynamic therapy and drugs injected into the eye. The more common form, dry AMD, although less severe than wet, can only be controlled, not treated.
- **Diabetic Retinopathy:** The most common diabetic eye disease, diabetic retinopathy is the result of progressive damage to the tiny blood vessels of the retina. If new blood vessels grow on the surface of the retina, they can bleed into the eye and block vision. The National Eye Institute (NEI) estimates that 40% of diagnosed diabetics have some degree of retinopathy.
- **Cataracts:** According to Mayo Clinic, about half of all 65-year-old Americans and an even higher percentage of people in their seventies have some degree of cataracts. Blurriness and cloudiness are common complaints and are a result of the clumping of naturally occurring protein within the lens of the eye. While cataracts can

lead to blindness or glaucoma if left untreated, cataract laser surgery is extremely safe, has an immense success rate, and is the most frequently performed surgery in the U.S. Your doctor can restore your vision by replacing your clouded lens with a man-made intraocular lens (IOL).

- **Glaucoma:** Sometimes known as the silent thief of sight, glaucoma

operates slyly and rarely exhibits symptoms until its damage is done, making preventative eye exams a must. An excessive build-up of fluid and pressure in the front of the eye is usually responsible for glaucoma. It's the second leading cause of blindness in the U.S. and extremely prevalent among African Americans, diabetics and people over 60. If detected early enough, medical treatment or surgery can prevent complete vision loss. Symptoms of acute angle-closure include eye pain, redness, nausea and seeing colored halos around lights, while primary open-angle glaucoma displays itself as a loss of peripheral vision or tunnel vision.

- **Detached Retina:** While not classified as a degenerative eye disease, a detached retina is a serious emergency that requires immediate medical attention. Its main warning sign is usually described as a sensation that a dark curtain has settled across the field of view. Anyone experiencing this phenomenon is urged to visit the eye doctor or emergency room. If a detached retina is not reattached within hours, vision loss can be permanent.

Prevention and Awareness

While not all factors that contribute to eye disease are controllable, you can

play an active role in prevention by following the below recommendations:

- **Eat healthy foods.** Studies suggest that certain nutrients like lutein and zeaxanthin found in green leafy veggies, zinc, as well as the antioxidants in vitamins A, C and E can help lower your risk for AMD. Eating fishes rich in omega-3 fatty acids is also purported to play a preventative role.
- **Don't smoke.** The disease risks of smoking are endless and include early onset AMD, diabetic retinopathy, hypertension and cataract formation.
- **Protect your eyes** from UV exposure by wearing sunglasses. That minor action can have a major impact on eye health and may also play a role in cataract prevention.
- **Control weight, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.** There is a strong link between all these factors and AMD, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy.
- **Exercise.** Certain studies by the American Academy of Ophthalmology suggest that exercise can reduce the risk of AMD by up to 70 percent. There is also a link between physical activity and the prevention of glaucoma.
- **Diabetics:** Closely monitor your blood sugar and insulin levels with your doctor. Diabetes is the leading cause of new cases of blindness among adults aged 20–74 years.
- **Wear safety eyewear** during sports and other activities that could harm your eyes. Serious eye injuries can lead to glaucoma.
- **Be Aware** of any abrupt changes with your sight and seek immediate medical care.