



Regular eye check ups can save vision

March is "Save Your Vision Month." Those who have good vision may not give much thought to eye care. But since many eye problems develop with age, it is never too soon to think about the issue.

Question: How often should eyes be checked?

Answer: The American Optometric Association recommends a checkup for children at 6 months, 3 and 6 years, then every two years until age 18. Adults should be checked every two to three years until age 40, every two years until age 60 and yearly after that.

Those who wear glasses or contact lenses should see a vision professional once a year, and people with specific eye problems may need attention even more often.

Q: Why should eyes be checked more often as you age?

A: Besides normal wear and tear on the eyes, a number of age-related health problems can cause damage. Diabetes can go undetected until an eye

exam shows damage to blood vessels in the retina. Catching the condition early can help protect eye health and prevent other serious complications.

Glaucoma can damage vision and even lead to blindness without a person experiencing symptoms. Glaucoma cannot be prevented, but it can be controlled if treated early. Loss of vision due to glaucoma, however, cannot be restored. This is one of the main reasons for regular exams after age 40.

Another irreversible cause of vision loss is age-related macular degeneration, a leading cause of blindness in people over 60. Damage to the most sensitive portion of the retina causes a loss of sharp vision and can lead to a dark or blank area in the center of vision.

Cataracts -- clouding of the lens -- causes hazy vision with increased sensitivity to glare. Interestingly, a temporary improvement in near vision can occur with the formation of a cataract. The exact cause of cataracts is unknown, but the

condition can be treated surgically by replacing the lens with a plastic artificial lens.

Q: Can nutrition affect any of these eye conditions?

A: Maintaining good diet and exercise habits can help prevent diabetes and associated eye problems. And research indicates the development and progression of macular degeneration may be reduced by increased intake of vitamins C and E, zinc and the carotenoid beta carotene. Good food sources include vegetables, fruits, lean red meats and beans. Two other carotenoids, lutein and zeaxanthin, also appear important to macular health. The superstar food sources of these include dark green vegetables such as kale, collards, spinach, turnip greens and broccoli. Corn, peas and dark leaf lettuces also are good sources.

What is good for eye health is likely good for the rest of the body, too. Save your vision and your health!

Alan Titchenal, Ph.D., C.N.S. and Joannie Dobbs, Ph.D., C.N.S.
are nutritionists in the Department of Human Nutrition, Food and Animal Sciences,
College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, UH-Manoa.
Dr. Dobbs also works with the University Health Service
