

Protect your eyes for a lifetime of good vision

Our eyes are constantly changing. By age 50, nearly everyone experiences some vision loss. Knowing what changes to expect and when to seek the advice of your doctor of optometry are the first steps in protecting your eyesight for a lifetime.

Common vision conditions among adults over 50

- **Presbyopia** – If holding print at arm's length makes it easier to read, you may have presbyopia, a common vision condition that usually appears between ages 40 and 45. Your doctor of optometry can treat presbyopia with glasses or contact lenses.
- **Spots and floaters** – A fairly common and usually harmless vision condition, these may appear as small floating specks, thread-like strands, or showers of brilliant crystals in your field of vision. Your doctor of optometry can determine if spots and floaters are harmless or serious and recommend treatment.
- **Dry eye** – As the eye ages, the production of tears decreases. If your eyes itch or burn, you have a sensation of something foreign in your eye, or have fluctuating vision, seek the advice of your doctor of optometry. Dry eye can be treated, often with eye drops. It is especially important to check with your doctor if you wear contact lenses.
- **Cataracts** – A clouding of the eye lens that usually develop slowly over time, untreated cataracts can cause partial or complete blindness. A thorough eye examination by your doctor of optometry will reveal early signs. Your doctor of optometry can provide treatment until surgery may be needed, refer you to another doctor, and provide care after surgery (including eyeglasses or contact lenses) to restore your vision.
- **Glaucoma** – This is a group of disorders of the eye leading to progressive retinal cell damage. Although glaucoma affects only 3 percent of the population, it is more common in people over age 40 and among the black population. If untreated, glaucoma

can cause blindness. Because glaucoma rarely has any early warning signs, it is important to have an annual comprehensive eye examination that includes glaucoma testing.

- **Retinal disorders** – Eye conditions that affect the retina such as macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and retinal detachment have a greater chance of developing as the eyes age. Thanks to advances in eye care, many conditions that were once considered sight-threatening can be treated if diagnosed early. Technology has also helped those with visual impairments make the best of their remaining sight.
- **Systemic conditions and vision** – These are conditions that affect the body as a whole. A thorough eye examination may reveal signs of systemic diseases (such as diabetes and hypertension) that affect the eyes. When disease is present, your doctor of optometry will refer you to an appropriate health care professional for further care and work with him or her to monitor the disease and treat any effects it may have on your vision. Although some diseases may decrease vision, early detection may delay or prevent further vision loss.



The eye examination

The best way to protect your eye health throughout life is to have a comprehensive eye exam annually by a doctor of optometry. Elements of the exam vary, but most include:

- A review of your general health and eye history.
- An internal and external examination of your eyes to diagnose eye health problems and identify signs of general health problems affecting the eyes.
- Tests to determine your ability to see sharply and clearly at various distances.
- A diagnosis of any vision condition present such as nearsightedness, farsightedness and presbyopia.
- Tests to determine eye coordination and eye muscle function.
- An evaluation of your ability to change focus.
- Tests to diagnose glaucoma, including a field of vision test and a measurement of your eye's fluid pressure.

Medicare coverage: what you should know

Under Medicare, covered eye care services include the eye health part of your eye examination, if you have a symptom of an eye health problem that necessitated your exam, and necessary treatment. Checking your vision for changes in your eyeglass or contact lens prescription and the eyewear itself is not covered by Medicare unless the eyewear is needed after cataract surgery.

An important reminder about medications

Medications may impair vision and affect results of diagnostic tests. Tell your doctor of optometry about any medications you are taking.

Tips for better vision

Ninety-five percent of adults will have some vision loss after age 50. The following tips can help:

YOUR VISION, THE SECOND 50 YEARS

At home

- Use more and brighter lighting and a flashlight when needed.
- Control glare with translucent lamp shades and light-filtering blinds or shades.
- Contrast colors so steps, rugs and light switches can be spotted quickly.

In the car

- Wear proper eyewear for driving; quality sunglasses for day; and anti-reflective lenses to reduce headlight glare at night.
- If you have difficulty seeing in low light, minimize driving at dusk, dawn, and at night, or stay on well-lit, familiar streets.

The role of your doctor of optometry

Your doctor offers a full range of diagnostic and treatment services for eye and vision health. Should an eye disease or condition lead to loss of vision, your optometrist can help, with low-vision rehabilitation aids, such as prescriptive lenses, prisms, telescopic or technology devices that enhance your visual capabilities. You can help by eating right, practicing good health habits and having an annual comprehensive eye exam.

A final word

Technology may help enhance learning and provide entertainment, but many devices are still relatively new and the long-term effects on the eyes are not yet fully known. Early-stage research on the blue light associated with many of today's devices shows signs that overexposure and the obsessive way many of us stare at our screens may affect or even age the eyes.

Be sure to watch for signs of digital eyestrain, which can cause burning, itchy or tired eyes, headaches, fatigue, loss of focus, blurred vision, double vision or head and neck pain. Take frequent visual breaks by practicing the 20-20-20 rule: when using technology or doing near work, take a 20-second break every 20 minutes and view something 20 feet away.

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