



Health & Wellness News Spring 2008

Low Vision/AMD Awareness

Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD) is still not a commonly known affliction, yet approximately 1.65 million Americans age 50 and older have the disease. These numbers are expected to grow to 2.95 million cases by the year 2020, due to the rapidly aging population.

AMD robs people of their central vision and often, the ability to read a book, recognize a face, see fine details, and distinguish some colors. There are two forms of AMD: "dry" and "wet". Dry AMD is the most common form of the disease. Vision loss in dry AMD usually progresses slowly. Wet AMD is less common, but more rapidly threatening to vision. Wet AMD causes tiny blood vessels under the retina to leak or break open. This distorts vision and causes scar tissue to form.

Although there is no known cure for AMD, research continues for the disease, including promising new drug therapies designed to slow the effects of AMD. Diets rich in certain antioxidants, including lutein and zeaxanthin can help protect the eyes against AMD and a study by the National Eye Institute suggests that pharmacological-level doses of zinc, vitamins C and E, and beta carotene may help slow the progression of AMD.



The exact cause of AMD is unknown, but risk factors for the disease include age, race (Caucasians are more susceptible), smoking and those with cardiovascular disease and hypertension. Patients with a family history of the disease are also at high-risk. Those who are at high risk of AMD require periodic, dilated eye exams.

The following are some signs of AMD:

- Straight lines like telephone poles, sides of buildings or street lights look wavy
- Written text or type appears blurry
- A dark or empty spot may block the center of your vision

If you experience any of these symptoms schedule an eye exam immediately.

Sports Eye Safety

More than 40,000 people a year suffer eye injuries while playing sports.

For all age groups, sports-related eye injuries occur most frequently in baseball, basketball and racquet sports.

Almost all sports-related eye injuries can be prevented. Whatever your game, whatever your age, you need to protect your eyes!



Take the following steps to avoid sports eye injuries:

- Wear proper safety goggles (lensed polycarbonate protectors) for racquet sports or basketball.
- Use batting helmets with polycarbonate face shields in youth baseball.
- Use helmets and face shields approved by the U.S. Amateur Hockey Association when playing hockey.
- Know that regular eyeglasses don't provide enough protection

The following guidelines can help you find a pair of eyeguards right for you:

If you wear prescription glasses, ask your eye doctor to fit you for prescription eyeguards. If you're a monocular athlete (a person with only one eye that sees well), ask your eye doctor what sports you can safely participate in.

Buy eyeguards at sports specialty stores or optical stores. Don't buy sports eyeguards without lenses. Only "lensed" protectors are recommended for sports use. Make sure the lenses either stay in place or pop outward in the event of an accident. Lenses that pop in against your eyes can be very dangerous.

Fogging of the lenses can be a problem when you're active. Some eyeguards are available with anti-fog coating or have side vents for additional ventilation.

Check the packaging to see if the eye protector you select has been tested for sports use. Also check to see that the eye protector is made of polycarbonate material, which is the most impact resistant.

Sports eyeguards should be padded or cushioned along the brow and bridge of the nose. Padding will prevent the eyeguards from cutting your skin.

Try on the eye protector to determine if it's the right size. If you purchased your eyeguards at an optical store, an optical representative can help you adjust the eye protector for a comfortable fit.

Healthy Vision

Good health is an important part of good vision. The healthier you are, the better chance you have of avoiding risks to your eyes.



Avoiding or quitting smoking can have many good effects on your health. Quitting smoking may reduce your risk of developing age related macular degeneration, cataracts, glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy if you are diabetic.

Lifelong good nutrition may lower your risk of some eye diseases. By eating a healthy, balanced diet, you will have a better chance of staying healthy and keeping your eyes healthy.

The National Eye Institute (NEI) released a study that found people who were at risk of developing advanced age-related macular degeneration (AMD) benefited from pharmacological-level doses of zinc, vitamins C and E, and beta-carotene. Other research has suggested that a lifetime diet rich in certain dark green vegetables, such as spinach and kale, may reduce your risk of getting AMD.

Another way that your vision can benefit from a healthy diet is that by eating healthy foods, you will lower your risk of developing other diseases, such as diabetes, which can lead to diabetic eye disease.



Staying active is part of a healthy lifestyle that can improve your overall health. Exercising regularly can reduce your risk of developing problems that can lead to eye disease.

Controlling your blood pressure is not just a good idea for your heart. It is also a good idea for protecting your eyesight. High blood pressure can increase your risk for glaucoma and your risk for diabetic retinopathy if you have diabetes.

Everyone who spends time outdoors (including children) should wear sunglasses and a wide brimmed hat. Your sunglasses should be able to absorb 99-100% of both UV-A and UV-B rays.

UV rays may be related to some eye diseases later in life, such as macular degeneration, cataracts and even skin cancer around the eyelids. They can also cause corneal sunburn, called photokeratitis, which can lead to temporary vision loss.

You should also have regular eye exams to periodically check the health of your eyes. Every individual, regardless of age, should have an annual eye exam