



Healthy Vision

Healthy vision is one of our most treasured senses. However, many of us take it for granted until it begins to fail. As with your overall physical health, vision health benefits from proper nutrition, regular exercise, and vitamin supplements. Here are recommendations to promote and maintain healthy vision:

Foods

Eat foods rich in essential carotenes (in particular lutein and lycopene), flavonoids, the amino acid glutathione and other nutrients found in natural foods. Among other things, these nutrients support flexible lenses and the health of the retinal area. Such foods include:

- Eggs
- Fresh fruits
- Dark red and green vegetables
- Berries and nuts
- Seafood

Fruits and vegetables also help subdue oxygen free radicals. Long-term free radical damage is now recognized as the greatest contributor there is to age-related health problems. The best fruit sources for protecting eyes from free radical damage are prunes, raisins and blueberries. For vegetables, it's kale, raw spinach and Brussels sprouts.

Food allergies can affect healthy vision Studies show that increased intraocular pressure may be triggered by food allergies.

Limit your intake of sugar Studies show that simple sugars like D-glucose, D-galactose, and so on, move from the fluid in the eyes into the lens, impairing healthy vision. Read food labels and make sure sucrose, dextrose, fructose, maltose, lactose and other sugars are not listed among the first four or five ingredients. Especially steer clear of corn syrup, a high-fructose sugar.

Vitamins and Minerals Glutathione transports the minerals calcium, potassium and sodium in and out of the lens, protects certain proteins from oxidizing, and slows the breakdown of DNA within the lens. Low levels of glutathione lead to hardened, inflexible lens. As far as your diet goes, increase your intake of glutathione-rich cruciferous vegetables, such as Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, cabbage, kale, bok choy, cress, mustard, horseradish, turnips, rutabagas and kohlrabi.

Exercise Taking a vigorous walk for at least a half hour can temporarily reduce discomfort and pressure in the eyes.

Age-Related Macular Degeneration

What it is: The macula provides the sharp, central vision we need for reading, driving, and seeing fine detail. It is a small, but very important area in the back of the eye. Macular degeneration refers to the breakdown of the macula.

What You Need To Do: Get regular eye exams from an eye doctor, especially after age 65. Your doctor can detect early stages of macular degeneration.

Why It's Important: Macular degeneration can cause sudden, severe loss of vision in the middle of your visual field.

Symptoms: Macular degeneration reduces vision in the central part of the retina. It usually does not affect the eye's side, or peripheral, vision. If you notice words looking blurry on a page, a dark or empty area in the center of your vision, or crookedness of straight lines, you may have symptoms of macular degeneration. You may lose vision in one eye but be able to see well out of the other eye. You will notice central vision problems more quickly if both eyes have macular degeneration. The two most common types of AMD are "dry" (atrophic) and "wet" (exudative):

"Dry" Macular Degeneration (atrophic)- Most people who have AMD have the "dry" form. It is caused by aging and thinning of the tissues of the macula. Vision loss is usually gradual.

"Wet" Macular Degenerations (exudative)- The "wet" form of macular degeneration accounts for about 10% of all AMD cases. It results when abnormal blood vessels form underneath the retina at the back of the eye. These new blood vessels leak fluid or blood and blur central vision. Vision loss may be rapid and severe.

Deposits under the retina called drusen are a common feature of macular degeneration. Drusen alone usually do not cause vision loss, but when they increase in size or number, this generally indicates an increased risk of developing advanced AMD. People at risk for developing advanced AMD have significant drusen, prominent dry AMD, or abnormal blood vessels under the macula in one eye ("wet" form).

Treatment: Macular degeneration cannot be reversed. Its impact, however, can be reduced. Although the exact causes of macular degeneration are not fully understood, antioxidant vitamins and zinc may reduce the impact of AMD in some people. You should speak with your eye doctor to determine if you are at risk for developing advanced AMD, and to learn if supplements are recommended for you. Laser surgery and medications can be used to treat certain types of macular degeneration. Certain types of "wet" macular degeneration can be treated with laser surgery, a brief outpatient procedure that uses a focused beam of light to slow or stop leaking blood vessels that damage the macula. A treatment called photodynamic therapy (PDT) uses a combination of a special drug and laser treatment to slow or stop leaking blood vessels. Another form of treatment targets a specific chemical in your body that is critical in causing abnormal blood vessels to grow under the retina. That chemical is called vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF). Anti-VEGF drugs block the trouble-causing VEGF, reducing the growth of abnormal blood vessels and slowing their leakage. These procedures may preserve more sight overall, though they are not cures that restore vision to normal. Despite advanced medical treatment, most people with macular degeneration still experience some vision loss.

Eye Safety and Sports

Americans love sports and they love to look fashionable. And we often times insist that sports and fashion go together, sometimes to our own detriment.

We wear helmets to protect our heads and pads and braces to protect our bones and joints, so why not take the extra step to protect our eyes? We take extra steps to prevent concussions, broken bones, bruises and chipped teeth, but what do we do to prevent the possibility of permanent vision loss, a scratched cornea or fractured eye socket?

Broken bones and bruises will heal, but a serious eye injury can put you on the disabled list from your favorite sport for the rest of your life.

How Do I Protect My Eyes While Playing Sports?

The ways in which an unprotected eye may be injured in a sporting event are too numerous to count. But the ways in which we can protect our eyes are simple and straightforward. It is especially important that children who are learning to coordinate or who have low skill levels wear protective eye gear. To reduce the risk of a serious eye injury, the following precautions should be taken when playing.

Baseball. In the event of an errant pitch, a ball lost in the sun or a thrown bat, a baseball player should wear a faceguard made of a sturdy plastic or polycarbonate metal material along with eye goggles or eye guards.

Basketball. Basketball players should wear eye goggles at all times in the event of an errant elbow, a stray poke from another player's finger or even an errantly thrown basketball.

Soccer and football. Like other contact sports, an errant elbow, ball, foot or finger can cause serious damage to the unprotected eye. Players should wear sports eye guards and in football a full faceguard should also be worn.

Hockey. Ever get a good look at a hockey player's teeth? Imagine such damage to your eyes. Sticks, pucks and elbows all fly freely during a hockey match, and a player should wear a full polycarbonate material or wire mask to prevent eye and other possible facial injuries.

Tennis or racquetball. To protect your eyes from an errant or misjudged ball, or in the case of racquetball your opponents racquet, protective eye goggles should be worn at all times while playing these sports.

How Do I Know My Eye Gear Will Be Effective?

Regular reading glasses, sunglasses, and sometimes even safety glasses don't provide necessary eye protection for sports participants. Athletes need to purchase sports eye guards that are tailored to protect the eyes while playing the specific sport. Prices for the correct safety sports eyewear vary.

Other suggestions for sports eye safety include:

- Purchase eye guards at a sports store or optical store and have someone familiar with your eyesight and the sport fit you for the eyewear.
- Don't purchase eyewear that doesn't contain the correct lenses. Lenses should be secure because with many demanding sports there is the chance that a lens may pop inward, which could cause scratching or damage to the eye.
- Eye guards should contain cushioning along the eyebrow and the edge of the nose to help prevent the athlete from cutting or damaging his or her face.

How Will Protective Gear Affect My Performance?

Because the eyes help an athlete determine timing, coordination and speed, the ability to see well while protecting vision is of utmost importance. Fortunately, many sports eyewear manufacturers today take into account an athlete's activity, along with environmental factors to create eyewear that will give players an edge in their chosen sport. Also, if the sport is being played outdoors, it is very important for athletes to wear eyeglasses that contain UV protection for sunray blockage.



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