



When was your last eye examination?



Was there ever a time that you realized that you couldn't read a road sign while you were driving until you were right on top of it? What about the time you were trying to read the nutrition label on the soup can to find out the salt content? Another example may be attempting to read a medicine bottle or a recipe in a book. Vision is

often neglected because it seems like other health issues keep us occupied.

A visit to the eye doctor tends to be last doctor's appointment on your list. If you don't take care of your eyes, other health issues will soon arise. The eye doctor needs to be a regular part of your health maintenance.

It is recommended that over the age of 40, regular comprehensive eye exams are important to detect age related problems of the eye such as not being able to see objects that are close to you (presbyopia), loss of central vision (macular degeneration) and loss of side vision (glaucoma; peripheral vision).

Presbyopia

Problem: Presbyopia develops as you age. A symptom is that your eyes cannot focus when you look at objects close to you.

Signs and Symptoms: The signs and symptoms of presbyopia are that your eyes are tired and you cannot focus on close up objects.

What to Do: Presbyopia cannot be prevented but can easily be treated by corrective reading glasses, or sometimes surgery. Visit your eye doctor on a regular basis.

Macular Degeneration

Problem: Macular degeneration is the leading cause of vision loss and blindness in people 65+ years of age in the United States and Europe. Your central vision is lost.

Signs and Symptoms: With macular degeneration, you would have difficulty in reading, writing, and performing certain tasks.

Risk Factors: According to board certified optometric physician Troy Bedinghaus, owner of Lakewood Family Eye Care in Florida, the top risk factors for the most common cause of vision loss in people ages 65+ are smoking, aging, high blood pressure, obesity, family history, low levels of nutrients, female, Caucasian, and the sun. Although macular degeneration can develop in the absence of these risk factors, individuals that have any of these problems are more likely to develop the disease.

What to Do: Visit your eye doctor on a regular basis. Low-vision aids such as hand-held magnifiers may be helpful. In certain cases a special laser treatment can be used to reduce the risk for severe vision loss.

Glaucoma

Problem: With glaucoma, fluid in the eye increases.

Signs and Symptoms: Glaucoma causes loss in your side vision.

Risk Factors: Anyone is at risk for glaucoma but some more than others. African Americans over 40, Mexican

Americans over 65, and those people with a Family History have the highest risk.

What to Do: Visit your eye doctor for a comprehensive eye exam and dilation. Early detection is key. Medicine and surgery can be used as treatment.

Did you know that....

In 2006, more than 20 million Americans reported experiencing significant vision loss.

The loss of vision can decrease your ability to perform basic activities of daily living and is associated with an increased risk for depression.

Many health issues can develop if you don't get your eyes checked regularly such as increased sensitivity to glares, difficulty seeing at night, and balance problems which may lead to falls. If you find yourself bumping into objects, tending to walk close to walls, or experiencing high sensitivity to light, you may be experiencing loss of vision.

If you have low vision problems you may need to obtain books that have larger print, special (corrective) glasses, auditory computer software, or books that include Braille. The best way to find out what works best for you is to get in touch with an eye doctor. Try talking with friends and family, your family doctor, or an ophthalmology department at a local hospital to find the best doctor for you. Eye exams should be an important part of your health care plan and can lead you to a "Healthier Tomorrow." For more information contact: National Eye Institute, 2020 Vision Place, Bethesda, Md., 20892-3655 (305-496-5248), www.nei.nih.gov National Association for Visually Handicapped, 22 W. 21st Street, 6th Floor, New York, N.Y., 10010 (212-889-3141), www.navh.org National Center for Health Statistics., National Health Interview Survey, 2006, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm.

This column was written by Aaron Weir, Student Intern at the Center for Healthy Aging. CHA is a part of the Department of Epidemiology in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. It is one of 33 Prevention Research Centers in the United States funded by the Center for Disease Control. For questions and more information contact David J. Fetterman, Community Outreach Coordinator & Director of Education at the Center for Healthy Aging at (412) 383-3121 or visit www.healthysaging.pitt.edu.