

In March, Take Some Steps to Save Your Vision

By: Dr Rey Garrido

March is Save Your Vision Month and the perfect time to tend to your eyesight.

Whether you have been blessed with 20/20 vision or sentenced to a life behind glasses, the health of your eyes should be as paramount in your life as the health of your heart. According to recent data, there are 168.5 million adults' vision correction users in the United States-75 percent of the total U.S. population and more than 20 million Americans suffer from severe vision loss. With statistics like that, anyone can see that eye care should be a priority for everyone. While not all eye diseases can be prevented, there are simple steps that everyone can take to help their eyes remain healthy now and reduce their chances of vision loss in the future. You want your eyesight to last you a lifetime and, by following a few simple steps, you can save your eyes and vision.

Here are the top 10 tips to protect your vision:

Wear sunglasses -- UV blocking sunglasses delay the development of cataracts, since direct sunlight hastens their formation. Sunglasses prevent retinal (sensory tissue lining the back of the eye) damage; they also protect the delicate eyelid skin to prevent both wrinkles and skin cancer around the eye, and both cancerous and non-cancerous growths on the eye. The US standard states that the lenses should have a UVB (280 to 315nm) transmittance of no more than one per cent and a UVA (315 to 380nm) transmittance of no more than 0.5 times of the visual light transmittance.

Don't smoke – Stop smoking! Not only is it bad for health in general, but it directly linked to eye problems. Studies show that current smokers and ex-smokers are more likely to develop macular degeneration than people who have never smoked. Smokers are also at increased risk for developing cataracts at a younger age.



Eat right – Mom was right, carrots are good for your eyes, but tomatoes and peppers help out your eye health, too. In fact, there are a delectable array of foods that can protect your eyes from such diseases as macular degeneration. Eating a variety of vegetables, especially leafy green ones, should be an important part of your diet.

Foods to improve your vision health and protect the eyes include:

- Foods rich in lutein and zeaxanthin such as eggs and dark green leafy veggies like kale and spinach.
- Fruits and vegetables containing beta-carotene that are deep orange or yellow like carrots, mangos and peaches.

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- Fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C like oranges, strawberries, green peppers and tomatoes.
 - Foods rich in vitamin E such as almonds, pecans and sunflower seeds.
 - Foods containing zinc like meat, liver, whole grains and milk.

Baseline eye exam --

Even if you don't have any current vision problems, you should still see an eye care professional for a comprehensive eye examine so problems can be diagnosed early and suggestions can be made for improving or preserving vision. Eye diseases, such as glaucoma, cataracts and macular degeneration, or other medical conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure, can damage vision or eventually cause blindness. And, patients may never experience symptoms until the problem is too severe to treat. Children, especially, should be seen early, starting in as early as infants or at least upon starting pre-school and then yearly. Vision screenings at work, doctor's office or school only serve as preliminary tests. 25 percent of school-aged children have some sort of vision problem so early detection is crucial.

Eye protection -- An estimated 2.5 million eye injuries occur in the U.S. each year, so it is critical to wear proper eye protection to avoid eye injuries during sports such as hockey and baseball and home projects such as home repairs, gardening, and cleaning. For most repair projects and activities around the home, standard ANSI-approved protective eyewear will be sufficient. Sports eye protection should meet the specific requirements of that sport; these requirements are usually established and certified by the sport's governing body and/or the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).

Know your family history -- Many eye diseases cluster in families, so you should know your family's history of eye disease because you may be at increased risk. Age-related eye diseases, including cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and macular degeneration are expected to dramatically increase--from 28 million today to 43 million by the year 2020.

Early intervention -- Most serious eye conditions, such as glaucoma, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy are more easily and successfully treated if diagnosed and treated early. Left untreated, these diseases can cause serious vision loss and blindness. Early intervention now will prevent vision loss later.

Contact lens care -- Follow your eye doctor's instructions regarding the care and use of contact lenses. Abuse, such as sleeping in contacts that are not approved for overnight wear, using saliva or water as a wetting solution, using expired solutions, and using disposable contact lenses beyond their wearing time can result in corneal ulcers, severe pain and even vision loss.



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Be aware of eye fatigue

Are you in front of a computer screen all day long? Then you may be among the 88 percent of Americans who suffer eyestrain from too much staring at the screen. Victims of "Computer Vision Syndrome," or CVS, suffer from headaches, loss of focus, burning, red, tired eyes, blurred vision and neck and shoulder pain. The key to avoiding CVS is to give your eyes breaks throughout the day. Try to abide by the "20-20-20 Rule": After 20 consecutive minutes of computer time, look up and focus on anything that is at least 20 feet away for at least 20 seconds. If symptoms persist, it could be a sign of several different conditions, such as dry eyes, uncorrected prescription, presbyopia, or poorly fit glasses. See your eye care professional to determine why you are having these problems and to receive proper treatment.

Know your eye care provider -- When you go to get your eyes checked, there are a variety of eye care providers you might see. Optometrists, ophthalmologists, and opticians all play an important role in providing eye care services to consumers. Optometrists are primary eye care providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage eye diseases and prescribe glasses and contacts to correct disorders of the visual system. Ophthalmologist are medical doctors who are specialty trained in the medical and surgical care of the eye. Opticians do not test vision or write prescriptions but instead are trained to design, verify and fit eyeglasses.

Again, the most important thing you can do for your eyes is to have them checked. This will help identify any problems and, hopefully, treat them so as not to harm your vision. Your eyecare professional can give you advice for how to preserve and protect your vision. Your children, too, need yearly exams to ensure their vision is developing correctly or to identify and treat problems early.

So, mark your calendars for Save Your Vision Month, and remember, yearly exams are your best defense against future vision problems.

Dr Rey Garrido is an optometric physician at Gastoneye Associates, 2325-A Aberdeen Blvd, Gastonia, NC. He has been providing comprehensive eye care the entire family at Gastoneye for more than 15 years.

www.gastoneye.com

