

# Your Eye Health

## Your Eyes and the Sun

The good news about sunlight is that it can improve your mood, regulate your wake/sleep cycle and help your body make vitamin D. The bad news is that it is hard on your eyes.

Sunlight has ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Over the course of a lifetime, it can damage your eyes.

## Protect Your Eyes

To protect your eyes from the sun:

- try to limit your time out in the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- wear sunglasses with large lenses that fit close to your face
- look for sunglasses that block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays.

Children's eyes are also at risk from UV rays. Sun damage builds up over time, so even young children should wear sunglasses with UV protection.

## Vision Screening

Vision screening:

- helps find vision problems
- identifies if you need more testing and vision care.

The screening may be done with devices called photo screeners or using eye charts. Vision screening does not take the place of a dilated eye exam.

## Eye Exam

A dilated eye exam is the only way to make sure your eyes are healthy. This exam will look for common vision problems and eye diseases, which can often have no warning signs. A regular eye exam can protect your sight and help you see your best.

## Vision Problems

The most common vision problems are refractive errors. These problems are known as:

- nearsightedness (myopia): You can see clearly close up, but it is blurry in the distance.
- farsightedness (hyperopia): You can see clearly in the distance, but it is blurry close up.
- astigmatism: You have focusing problems caused by the shape of the cornea (front part of the eye).
- presbyopia. You have trouble focusing on close objects.

Other vision problems include:

- cataracts: The lens of your eye becomes cloudy which makes it hard to see.
- glaucoma: The fluid pressure inside your eye is above normal. This can damage your optic nerve and cause vision loss or blindness.
- macular degeneration: Your retina becomes damaged which causes you to lose your central vision.

**(over)**

- **pterygium:** Tissue grows over the white part of your eye which changes the curve of your eyeball.

If you have any changes in your vision, make an appointment to see an eye care professional right away.

## Tips for Healthy Eyes

Along with having an eye exam and wearing sunglasses, here are some more tips for healthy eyes.

- **Know your family's eye health history.** Talk to your family members about their eye health history. It's important to know if anyone has been diagnosed with a disease or condition since many are hereditary (run in families). This will help to determine if you are at higher risk for developing an eye disease or condition.
- **Wear protective eyewear.** Wear protective eyewear when playing sports or doing activities around the home. Protective eyewear includes safety glasses and goggles, safety shields and eye guards.
- **Give your eyes a rest.** If you spend a lot of time at the computer or focusing on any one thing, you sometimes forget to blink and your eyes can get tired.
  - Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look away about 20 feet in front of you for 20 seconds. This can help reduce eyestrain.

- **Eat healthful foods.** Eating foods high in beta carotene can help keep your eyes strong and working well. Beta carotene is found in orange foods such as carrots, sweet potatoes and pumpkins.

Other healthful foods include:

- dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale or collard greens
  - fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna and halibut.
- **Avoid Tobacco.** Do not smoke. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing macular degeneration, cataracts and nerve damage. If you need help quitting, talk with your health care provider.

**Information adapted from  
the National Eye Institute.**