

# THE EYES HAVE IT

S P O N S O R E D B Y

N O R T H C O A S T E Y E C A R E



## Healthy eyes begin with sun protection

When it comes to conditions caused by harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun, individuals are quick to mention skin cancer. However, it's important to note that the eyes are delicate organs which are also very susceptible to sun damage.

UV rays are high-energy, invisible rays of light. These rays can warm up the planet and promote life. However, they can also be detrimental to areas of the body when overexposure occurs. When absorbed by the eyes, UV rays can create eye ailments or contribute to existing conditions.

One of the common side effects of too much eye exposure to UV rays is retinal damage. To understand the damage, one must first understand the role the retina plays in the eye.

The retina is responsible for taking the light and shadows the eye "sees" and converting this information into the electrical impulses that are sent to the brain to form the "picture"



in front of us. The retina is sort of the film inside of a camera. The macula is the most sensitive part of the retina. It is responsible for the fine detail we see. Without the macula, the images from our eyes would be blurry.

When the eyes are damaged from the sun, the retina can be compromised. Depending upon the damage, vision may become blurred or distorted.

Vision loss may also occur.

Retinal damage isn't the only damage that can occur from sun exposure. Cataracts, the result of gradually accumulating damage to the proteins of the lens, can also be caused by sun damage. This is often the case when UV exposure occurs from an early age. Pterygium, or tissue growth on the whites of the eyes that can compromise vision, may also

occur from UV exposure.

When it comes to cancer, many believe that melanoma of the skin is the only reaction to UV rays. However, although rare, melanoma can also occur in the eyes.

The best way to prevent sun-related eye damage is to stay out of the sun. Naturally this is not possible at all times. In these cases, sunglasses that offer at least 95 percent UV (blocking UVA and UVB radiation) protection are vital to eye health. Also, choose a tint on the sunglasses that blocks 80 percent of transmissible light, but no more than 90 to 92 percent of light, say eye experts. Look for lenses that block visible blue light and are large and closely fitted to the face.

One safety warning to heed, especially when purchasing sunglasses for children, is to skip ordinary sunglasses that have no UV protection. The dark lenses may actually enable the eye's pupil to dilate and let in more harmful UV radiation.

## Uveitis

By Dr. Beth Yoder

Q. What is uveitis of the eye?

A. Uveitis means there is inflammation inside the eye. There are many reasons for inflammation to be present in the eye, such as infections or immune system abnormalities. Sometimes there are unknown reasons. To determine the cause of the inflammation, your medical doctor should see you to perform a careful history and exam, as well as obtain blood work.

Treatment for uveitis usually involves steroid medications to suppress the inflammation and make the eye more comfortable. The length of treatment varies from patient to patient. Occasionally, uveitis can return after the medication has been discontinued. You should promptly report any change in vision, redness or pain.

## Diabetes and the eyes

By Dr. Thomas Kelly

Q. What are the dangers of diabetes?

A. Diabetic Retinopathy is often responsible for blindness in patients with Type 1 diabetes and is present in some form in almost all diabetics. More than 10 percent of new cases of blindness are diabetes-related. Now, with regular eye care, testing and treatment, patients at high-risk can be diagnosed and treated early to prevent deterioration of vision.

The presence of certain factors during an eye examination indicates whether a patient is at high risk for diabetic retinopathy. Based on the presence of these factors, a referral may be made and laser treatments may be recommended. For those at low risk, good diabetic control and careful monitoring of vision risk factors may be all that's necessary. Retinopathy affects the function of the retina – the area toward the back of the eye that is essential to our ability to see. The blood vessels that supply the nerves in this area are damaged, resulting in blurred vision. In more serious cases, scar tissue can develop and cause further vision problems.

Let untreated, blindness usually results.

## Easy, effective ways to protect your eyes while at work

For many of the nation's office workers, keeping eyes healthy and going strong is a legitimate concern. Hours spent in front of a computer monitor is not the ideal situation for a person's eyes, yet many people are at a loss as to how to protect their eyes while still getting their work done.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), two hours of computer use per day is all it takes to develop what is now referred to as Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS). CVS can include symptoms such as itchy or fatigued eyes and eyes that grow sensitive to light after prolonged computer use. Though computers aren't going anywhere, there are ways workers can minimize their risk of CVS while still getting their work done.

Beware of light reflections. Glare and shadows can negatively impact vision when sitting at the computer. When working at a desk, be sure to avoid facing an unshaded window or having an unshaded window directly behind you. If the layout of your office insists on either arrangement, use curtains, shades or blinds. To reduce reflections, position your desk and computer so the window is off to the side of your computer.

Consult your eye doctor. A big contributor to vision problems resulting from working at a computer is often the atypical distance the computer



screen is from the eyes. The text on a computer screen is often farther away than the text might be when we're reading a book, but closer than the text on street signs when we're driving. This intermediate distance can lead to problems with focus. For those who wear glasses, either full-

time or just to drive or read, this can be a big problem. You might want to consult your eye doctor to see if a separate prescription tailored to computer use might be appropriate.

It might be the computer. Chances are the position of

your computer monitor is playing a role in how well or how bad your eyes are feeling. Ideally, the monitor should be in a position where you are looking just over the top of the monitor when staring straight ahead. Keep the monitor at a slight upward angle as well, so your eyes are looking slightly downward when reading. Eyes focus more accurately when looking slightly downward, so this small adjustment can actually make a big impact on your eyes.

Keep eye drops nearby. Blinking helps our eyes remain moist. When using a computer we don't blink nearly as much as we normally do, often resulting in dry and irritated eyes. While it can be hard to make a conscious effort to blink more, give it a shot and also keep eye drops nearby to ensure your eyes avoid drying out over the course of a typical work day.

Give your eyes a break. Much like your legs might need to take breaks from sitting at a desk and be stretched out during the day, your eyes need to take breaks as well. Something as simple as focusing on an object that's farther away from your computer screen for 30 to 60 seconds can be enough of a break for your eyes. Keeping eyes focused on the same spot for too long can cause muscle strain and fatigue, so be sure to give your eyes a break several times over the course of a day.

## Eye Q&A

Dr. Dave Del Principe

Q. My mother and father had cataracts as they became older. Is a cataract a film that covers the eye?

A. No. A cataract is a clouding of the lens in the eye. The normally clear lens lets light enter the eye. As it becomes cloudy, less light enters and vision becomes blurry. Cataracts are common with age and can occur in one or both eyes. The clouding of the lens usually happens slowly over time. But it can also happen quickly. Cataracts may be caused by many things, including aging, diabetes, eye injuries, some medicines and ultraviolet light. There is usually no pain associated with cataracts. Regular eye exams help your doctor see if cataracts are affecting your vision.

Q. Can wearing eyeglasses weaken your eyes?

A. The most common misconception about wearing eyeglasses is that "if worn too much, they can make your eyes lazy or weak." This is far from accurate. The goal of a perfectly prescribed vision correction is two-fold. The first is obvious: to provide clear eyesight. The second is equally important but less obvious: to provide effortless visual ability. Many eyes see clearly without vision correction, but they may achieve this clarity by exerting unnecessary effort. If your eyes routinely exert unnecessary focusing effort to see, you may experience unnecessary fatigue, symptoms of discomfort and loss of visual achievement. Feel confident that wearing a properly prescribed lens correction will not in any way hasten the natural and expected changes your eyes will undergo throughout your lifetime.



Dr. Beth Yoder OD

Dr. David DelPrincipe OD

Dr. Thomas Kelly OD

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