See Well for a Lifetime:

Tips for keeping your eyes healthy as you age

As you age, you may notice changes in your vision such as having difficulty focusing on up-close objects or needing more light to see well. It is important to note, however, that vision loss and blindness are not a normal part of aging.

There are many things you can do to keep your eyes healthy and make sure you are seeing your best. Follow these simple steps for maintaining healthy vision well into your golden years.

HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE DILATED EYE EXAM. You might think your vision is fine or that your eyes are healthy, but visiting your eye care professional for a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the only way to really be sure. During this exam, your eye care professional places drops in your eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupil to allow more light to enter the eye the same way an open door lets more light into a dark room. This enables your eye care professional to get a good look at the back of the eyes and examine them for any signs of damage or disease. After this exam, your eye care professional can also let you know if your vision can benefit from glasses or contact lenses.

KNOW YOUR RISK FACTORS. As you get older, you are at higher risk of developing age-related eye diseases and conditions such as age-related macular degeneration (AMD), cataract, diabetic eye disease, dry eye, and glaucoma. Having a family history of eye disease also puts you at higher risk for diseases like glaucoma and AMD. Finally, being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic conditions that can lead to vision loss, such as diabetic eye disease. If you are having trouble maintaining a healthy weight, talk to your doctor.

EAT RIGHT TO PROTECT YOUR SIGHT. You've heard carrots are good for your eyes. But eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, particularly dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, or collard greens is important for keeping your eyes healthy, too. Research has also shown that there are eye health benefits from eating fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and halibut. A healthy diet can also help you maintain a healthy weight, which can help protect your vision.

WEAR YOUR SHADES AND A BRIMMED HAT. Sunglasses and a brimmed hat are great fashion accessories, but their most important job is to protect your eyes from the sun's harmful rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation. Prolonged sun exposure is associated with developing cataract and AMD.

DON'T SMOKE. Smoking is as bad for your eyes as it is for the rest of your body. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing AMD, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to vision loss and blindness.

USE PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR. Wear protective eyewear such as goggles and safety glasses, shields, and eye guards when playing sports or doing activities around the home and encourage your family and friends to do the same. Most protective eyewear lenses are made of polycarbonate, which is 10 times stronger than other plastics. Many eye care providers sell protective eyewear, as do some sporting goods stores.

For more information, visit **www.nei.nih.gov/agingeye**

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