

Vision Care

Why It's Important to Your Overall Health

When was the last time you had an eye exam? Perhaps you've never had one. Even if your vision seems normal, there are advantages to having an eye exam on a regular basis. Eye diseases such as glaucoma (internal pressure in the eye which causes damage to the optic nerve) and macular degeneration (changes in the retina that result in the gradual loss of central vision) can develop without any warning. Cataracts can also form well before you have any noticeable symptoms. Other health conditions that may be detected during an eye exam are diabetes and high blood pressure. Consider the following statistics:

- Diabetes affects about 18.2 million Americans and 5.2 million of these people don't know they have the disease.¹
- Approximately 13 million Americans suffer from early signs of AMD (age-related macular degeneration) and 1.75 million U.S. residents have significant symptoms associated with the disease.²
- More than 20 million Americans age 40 and older have cataracts.² More than half of all Americans age 65 and older have a cataract.²

What should I be doing?

Comprehensive eye exams can help provide information about a person's overall health while helping to detect diseases before symptoms show up on other parts of the body. We recommend that you schedule an eye examination at least every two years, and every year for those of you over the age of 65 or with diagnosed medical conditions. During a comprehensive eye exam, an eye care professional evaluates the complete visual system which usually includes documenting medical and eye history, testing visual acuity, pupil response and intraocular pressure, and make a diagnosis or prescription, if necessary.

Your eye care provider may also recommend a dilated fundus exam based on your medical history or a specific concern. She/He then places eye drops in your eyes that will enlarge or dilate the pupil giving a better view of the back part of the eye called the fundus. The provider can then examine your retina, optic disc, and retinal blood vessels. A variety of conditions could warrant a dilated fundus exam including a diabetic condition, hypertension, or sudden changes in vision including flashes or floaters. It may sound complicated, but an annual eye exam is a simple way to help insure your overall health.

If you haven't had an eye exam recently, take the time to schedule one today. **Don't forget the importance of your annual eye exam.**

Source:

(1) Prevent Blindness America, 2005

(2) All About Vision, 2006 (www.allaboutvision.com)

