

Protecting Our Eyes

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Ophthalmology

We all know it's important to have an annual physical to make sure our bodies are healthy, but we don't always follow this advice when it comes to our eyes. Prevention really is the best treatment for protecting our eyesight throughout our lives.

It's recommended that children receive their first complete eye exam by an ophthalmologist before they enter kindergarten. If there are familial eye diseases or if the parents or pediatrician note any eye problems, this exam should be done even earlier.

An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor who graduated from a medical school and then completed an internship and residency in Ophthalmology. He or she is trained to treat medical as well as routine eye problems and perform laser and eye surgeries.

Once a child has had his or her first eye exam, follow-up exams should be scheduled every two to three years as long as their eyes remain healthy. If there are any problems, these visits should be scheduled earlier. Adults with healthy eyes should have a complete exam every one to two years, while older adults should have their eyes checked at least every year or sooner if they are having problems.

What to Expect During an Exam

An initial eye exam will last approximately 40 minutes and will include a variety of tests such as near and distance vision, color vision, depth perception, alignment of the eyes and glaucoma, or eye pressure test. It is important to have your eyes checked for pressure since most glaucoma patients do not have symptoms and it may cause visual loss or blindness.

In addition, the doctor will look into the patient's eyes with a bright light to check for



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cataracts as well as checking the retina. Cataracts occur when the lens of the eye becomes opaque, resulting in blurred vision. This condition is common among older patients. However, vision can usually be improved following cataracts surgery. Cataract surgery is a procedure which involves removal of the opaque lens and implantation of an artificial lens.

Another condition, called macular

degeneration, can also be detected at this time. This disease affects the central area of the retina in which the retina actually degenerates resulting in a decreased or loss of the central field of vision.

By dilating a patient's eyes, the doctor can have a good look into the eyes and detect systemic disease such as diabetes as well as many other medical conditions.

Depending on the findings of all these tests, your doctor may perform other tests as necessary. He or she will also prescribe glasses and/or contacts as needed.

Prevention

Since poor eyesight and some eye diseases such as glaucoma and macular degeneration may be familial, regular routine eye exams can help detect problems early. One of the first warning signs that you may have less than 20/20 vision include having trouble seeing street signs and/or headaches after reading or working on a computer. Your child may have trouble in school reading the blackboard and very young children may seem to have trouble seeing their toys.

It is also very important to protect our eyes from the sun. Just like our skin, the ultra-violet rays of the sun can damage our eyes causing cataract formation, especially in older adults. Looking directly into the sun is

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especially damaging since it can harm your retina. Children should wear sunglasses as soon as their parents can find a pair that fit. Sunglasses should be rated to block 100 percent of UVA and UVB rays. In addition, be sure to wear sunglasses on cloudy days as well since many of the sun's damaging rays will filter through the clouds.

Finally, good nutrition plays an important role in maintaining your eyesight. Carrots are an excellent source of vitamin A which is essential for the functioning of our eyes. Other sources of vitamin A include apricots, mango, spinach, squash, parsley and cantaloupe, among others.

Selecting an Ophthalmologist

The best place to start when selecting an ophthalmologist is with your primary care physician or friends. Be sure to ask for the ophthalmologist's credentials. Ask where he or she was trained and if he or she has any additional sub-specialty training. Finally, be sure the ophthalmologist you select is board certified since this guarantees that he or she has met national standards set by the medical community.

For more information, call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at www.ah.com.

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