

March Is Save Your Vision Month

March is Save Your Vision Month and a perfect time to remind ourselves of the importance of eye health. Studies show there is a significant gap between what people think they know about eye health and what they actually know. While 81% of adults say they are knowledgeable about eye health, actual data does not support the same. For example, fewer than 20% of aging adults can identify the three main causes of blindness and almost 40% are unaware that you do not always experience symptoms before losing your vision. And, in case you did not know, the three common causes of blindness are glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and diabetic eye disease.

These three eye diseases cause low vision -- vision that is not correctable by standard eyeglasses, contact lenses, medication or surgery and that interferes with the ability to perform everyday activities. Low vision impacts many older adults and while it is not life-threatening, it can have a significant impact on your quality of life. The aging visually impaired population is the third fastest growing population of people needing services in the US. This population is expected to more than double by the year 2030 when the last generation of baby boomers reaches 65 years old.

So, what can you do to “Save Your Vision?” Here are a few tips:

- Eat a balanced diet: A balanced diet of colorful fruits, vegetables, and fish is incredibly beneficial in maintaining all areas of health. Essential nutrients in leafy greens, berries, beets, citrus, and even certain fish high in Omega 3s are vital for healthy vision.
- Stay hydrated: Dehydration reduces the lubrication of the eye, which can make eye strain and dry-eye even more uncomfortable. Keep your water bottle filled and keep it with you throughout the day.
- Stay active: Exercising 3-4 times a week is a significant benefit to your eyes and overall health. Exercising reduces your blood pressure, but it also reduces your eye pressure which is beneficial for lowering Glaucoma risk.
- Update your make up: If you wear eye makeup, particularly mascara, replace it routinely. These products should be used for no more than three months, eye shadows and pencil liners no more than one year.
- Protect your eyes from the sun: As the days get longer and the sun is shining brightly, don't forget to protect your eyes with 100% UV-blocking glasses. Like sunscreen protects your skin, the glasses protect your eyes from damaging light sun rays.
- Take a screen break: More and more people today of all ages spend many hours each day looking at a tablet, computer, or phone. Save your vision and adopt the 20/20/20 rule. Limit your digital eye strain by taking a break from your screen every 20 minutes, focusing on something at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
- Crush the smoking habit: Smoking has been linked to a significantly increased risk for Glaucoma, Cataracts, AMD, and Diabetic Retinopathy. Smokers are also twice as likely to develop Uveitis, an inflammation of the uvea that can lead to vision loss. Furthermore, smoke exacerbates dry-eye conditions. The good news is people who quit smoking almost reduce their risk in line with people who have never smoked.
- Schedule an eye exam: Don't delay in scheduling a routine eye exam. Eye exams can detect serious health concerns.

Know, too, that therapy can help. Physical, Occupational and Speech Therapists can make a significant impact in the lives of those affected by low vision. Therapists can dramatically improve quality of life for residents by optimizing visual performance, enhancing safety, increasing mobility, improving ADLs and minimizing/preventing falls and other injuries to achieve maximal functional independence.