



## Be Wise with Your Eyes . . .

Students at all levels are well into the school year – lots of fun, friends, and activities along with those same three constants: ‘reading, writing and arithmetic’ . . . the ones that cause a little stress and a lot of eyestrain especially while burning the midnight oil reading, completing big assignments and projects, or studying for tests.

Taking care of those ‘peepers’ at an early age is necessary because there are so many things that can affect our ability to see clearly: childhood behaviors, accidents, illnesses, and aging. It is important for our eyes, nervous system and brain to work together with clarity, focus and good depth perception to form visual and mental pictures of what things look like. Babies aren’t born with all their visual abilities. Just like they learn to walk and talk, babies learn to see. If an infant’s eyesight isn’t on the right track, eye and vision problems can cause developmental delays. We frequently start our eye care at the pediatrician’s office with an examination and/or by looking at the eye chart – reading the letters or telling shapes or direction of letters. A little later, the doctor checks for things like nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, amblyopia (or “lazy eye”), proper eye movement and eye alignment, how the eye reacts to light and darkness, and signs of other potential eye health concerns. If there are problems, assistance in the forms of glasses, contact lens, or even surgical intervention may be required to help us function in daily activities.

We are told that 80 percent of learning occurs through the eyes until about 12 years of age. But, according to the American Public Health Association, 10 percent of preschoolers have already developed vision deficiencies. One in four children has a vision problem that can interfere with learning and behavior. The American Optometric Association recommends that an eye exam be completed before a child enters school.

As our bodies mature we may experience vision changes depending on our work and recreation activities. People who do computer work, play excessive video games or do close work may experience eye strain that can create other problems like headaches, tired eyes, sore neck/back, blurred vision, or increased sensitivity to light.

Other age-related eye changes may include:

- Macular degeneration causes part of the retina to deteriorate and affects the central portion of vision impacting driving, reading, and close work.
- Cataracts cloud the eye’s lens blocking the passage of light.
- Glaucoma occurs when fluid pressure increases in the eye and damages the optic nerve. It is the leading cause of blindness in older adults
- Medical conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes can affect vision especially if not well controlled.

- Farsightedness, nearsightedness, astigmatism, and presbyopia are refractive error issues that affect many people, but can be improved with corrective eyewear.

**Vision Tips for all ages:**

- Get plenty of sleep – sometimes people complain that they can't see as well when they don't get enough rest.
- Exercise your eyes – look away from activity frequently to relax focusing muscle in the eye.
- Eat nutritious foods – eyes need the same basic nutrients to stay healthy.
- Take frequent breaks from activity. Stand up and walk around.
- Prevent eyestrain - limit electronic screen exposure - computers, cell phones, digital toys, etc.
- Use proper lighting when working by adjusting shades, blinds or light intensity.
- Reduce glare – wear sunglasses in the sun. Apply an anti-glare screen on computer monitor.
- Avoid certain children's toys - BB guns, projectiles, etc.
- Supervise your child's use of tools, pencils, pens, and scissors.
- Protect eyes when working with tools, and household cleaning supplies.

As we age, we need to have annual physical and eye examinations to ensure that we are in good health and retain good vision . . . after all, eyes are for a lifetime. Protect them and use them wisely!

*For more information, contact your eye doctor or visit the Mayo Clinic website.*