

Don't **Overlook** Your Eyes:

New Technology
Helps Protect
Your Vision for
a Lifetime



How old are your eyes?

Most of us don't think of our eyes as getting older. Despite wrinkles or graying hair, your spouse may still have that same "twinkle" in his eye or "sparkle" in hers. But, like the rest of your body, your eyes do experience changes as you age.

Three conditions commonly associated with aging eyes include cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. In fact, **any person** will get cataracts if they live long enough. And consider this:

- At age 60, you have a 2% risk of developing macular degeneration.
- At age 75, your risk jumps to 30%.
- Age is the #1 risk factor for each of these three eye conditions.

Davis Duehr Dean Ophthalmologist Anne Kilby, MD, does offer some words of comfort, however. "Although there are risk factors you have no control over, such as age or family history, there is still a lot you **can** control to improve your eye health. There's also a lot **we** can do."

For example, new technologies have been developed in just the last six months to two years, offering better ways to diagnose and treat these eye diseases.

What to Look For

According to Dr. Kilby, a cataract is basically a clouding of the eye's natural lens. It's a lot like looking through smudged glasses or a dirty camera lens. You may notice a gradual loss of vision or blurred vision. You may have difficulty driving at night because of halos around lights or problems with glare. In addition, you may need more or better light for reading or completing tasks. The only treatment for cataracts is surgery to replace the lens.

Glaucoma is a disease of the optic nerve that affects peripheral vision, resulting in "tunnel vision" and eventually blindness if left untreated.

Macular degeneration occurs in two forms: wet form and dry form. Basically, it is a process in

which the macula – the part of the retina which is responsible for good, sharp vision – degenerates. If left untreated, macular degeneration can result in very poor vision.

Generally, there are no symptoms until the very late stages of glaucoma and only minimal symptoms early on for macular degeneration. While cataracts can essentially be "cured" by surgery, all treatments for both glaucoma and macular degeneration are aimed at slowing or stopping the progression of the disease to preserve as much vision as possible. The good news is the treatments for both diseases are quite simple.

"Glaucoma is very treatable in the early stages with eye drops," explains Dr. Kilby. "And we treat the dry form of macular degeneration with high-dose antioxidant vitamins and recommend some simple dietary changes."

That's why regular eye exams are so important, she reinforces. "In most cases, people don't experience any symptoms early on. Early detection using simple tests during a routine eye exam can make all the difference."

A healthy adult with no family history of glaucoma or macular degeneration should get their eyes checked at least every two years. She recommends getting annual eye exams starting at age 60 if otherwise healthy or as young as 40 if you are at higher risk for these conditions. Risk factors include:

- Age
- Family history
- Race (African Americans are at higher risk for glaucoma: Caucasians, for macular degeneration.)
- Smoking
- High Blood Pressure
- Obesity and/or Diabetes

"We're all told to live right and eat right and exercise...it's an old message," says Dr. Kilby. "But remember, the same things are true for your eyes because it's all connected. The things that negatively impact your heart also negatively affect your eyes."

New Technologies Mean Better Vision

The technology for both diagnosing and treating cataracts, glaucoma, and macular degeneration continues to improve, offering more options and new hope.

For example, we can effectively "cure" cataracts through surgery by replacing the clouded lens with a new lens that corrects your vision for distance. Now, however, people can choose to "upgrade" to a multifocal lens that enables you to see distance, mid-range and near, similar to a bifocal lens.

New equipment called OCT (Optical Coherence Tomography) uses high-resolution ultrasound to monitor macular degeneration and the response to treatment so adjustments can be made.

"Macular degeneration has seen tremendous strides in the last six months," shares Dr. Kilby. "We are now able to better diagnose the wet form and treatment has improved dramatically."

New drugs stop the growth of abnormal blood vessels usually responsible for the damage caused by macular degeneration. A machine called PHP (Preferential Hyperacuity Perimeter), helps doctors more accurately diagnose patients who are at high risk for the wet form. Early diagnosis makes such a difference.

The goal is to help maintain your best possible eyesight throughout your lifetime.

"Your sight is so important," confirms Dr. Kilby. "Improving your vision can actually improve your quality of life. For example, it can help people maintain their independence as they age."

And maybe keep that sparkle, too.

If you'd like more information about these eye conditions or the board-certified ophthalmologists at Davis Duehr Dean, visit

www.deancare.com