



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Seeing Clearly

Healthy Vision Month, May 2014

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[Announcer] This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

[Dr. Gaynes] Welcome to *A Cup of Health with CDC*, a weekly feature of the *MMWR*, the Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report. I'm your host, Dr. Robert Gaynes.

If you're not seeing the world as clearly as you used to, you might be among the millions of people suffering from vision impairment.

Dr. John Crews is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. He's joining us today to discuss ways to take care of your eyes. Welcome to the show, John.

[Dr. Crews] Thank you very much.

[Dr. Gaynes] John, let's begin with how common are vision problems in the U.S.?

[Dr. Crews] Well, vision problems are, in fact, very common, probably affecting 21 million Americans. Of those, four million or so have severe vision impairment or blindness that cannot be corrected. However, 80 percent of vision problems in the United States are just a matter of getting an appropriate correction for their vision—so they just need glasses.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is vision impairment more common in any particular age group?

[Dr. Crews] That's a very good question. In fact, vision impairment is not evenly distributed across the population. Most of the people who experience vision impairment are over the age of 65, probably 15 percent. But among people over the age of 85, probably 25 percent experience vision impairment. It's also more common among women, blacks, and Hispanics.

[Dr. Gaynes] John, what are the most common vision problems?

[Dr. Crews] Well, we pay attention to four eye diseases that affect mainly older people. The most common is cataract which is a clouding of the lens and often occurs as a natural process of aging. Another condition is called macular degeneration which is kind of a central field loss; it's difficult to read newspaper print, and that's very common among white people, more so than blacks and Hispanics. Diabetic retinopathy is a result of diabetes and by taking care of yourself so that you don't develop diabetes, then you can avoid diabetic retinopathy. And then there's glaucoma which results in a field restriction, that is your peripheral vision is compromised. Untreated, glaucoma will result in

permanent vision loss and it's asymptomatic so it's very important that people who are at high risk receive routine eye exams.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often should people have their vision checked?

[Dr. Crews] It depends largely on age, risk factors, family history. I view it really as a part of good, routine health care. So children, by age five, should have an eye exam to check, especially for eye diseases like lazy eye, we call it amblyopia. And for adults over the age of 65, they should have their eyes examined at least every other year.

[Dr. Gaynes] How are we doing with addressing vision problems?

[Dr. Crews] Not so well. Given that 80 percent of vision problems could be corrected through getting new glasses, only three quarters of children have had an eye exam before school, so conditions like lazy eye, or amblyopia, have not been detected. And 60 percent of people with severe vision impairment have had their eyes examined which means that 40 percent of those have not. Well, I don't want to trivialize the effect of vision impairment. For older people, especially, they lose the capacity to drive a car and they lose the capacity to keep accounts on their own. They may be unable to read the label on a medicine bottle so they don't know what medicine they're taking or what the appropriate dosage is or they may not see water on the floor that would cause a slip hazard and therefore a fall and perhaps an injury. So it's really essential that we begin to think about vision impairment in conjunction with other age-related conditions. We know that, among people with vision impairment that they're more likely to have common chronic conditions like hypertension and stroke, for example.

[Dr. Gaynes] John, where can listeners get more information about vision problems?

[Dr. Crews] Well, they can go to our website. It's cdc.gov/visionhealth, one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, John. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. John Crews about problems.

Remember, early detection and timely treatment are the best ways to keep your eyes healthy. Children should get their first exam by age five. Adults over 65 should have their eyes examined at least once every two years. People with chronic conditions, such as diabetes or glaucoma, may need more frequent exams. Follow your health care provider's advice on how often you should have your eyes examined.

Until next time, be well. This is Dr. Robert Gaynes for *A Cup of Health with CDC*.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.