A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Keep an Eye on Your Eyes
Healthy Vision Month – May 2013
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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 struggle to read the pages of a book or a billboard on the side of the road, you might be among the millions of Americans who suffer from vision impairment. Problems seeing can impact many daily activities.

Dr. Jinan Saaddine is a medical epidemiologist with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. She's joining us today to discuss the importance of regular eye exams. Welcome to the show, Jinan.

[Dr. Saaddine] Thank you for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jinan, what are the leading causes of vision impairment?

[Dr. Saaddine] The most common vision problems are near-sightedness, far-sightedness, astigmatism, difficulty reading small print – all these can be easily corrected with glasses or contact lenses. Other vision problems could be related to more serious eye diseases, such as diabetic retinopathy, cataract, macular degeneration, and glaucoma. These diseases can lead to severe vision loss, even blindness, if not detected and treated early.

[Dr. Gaynes] What age groups are most commonly affected by vision problems?

[Dr. Saaddine] Vision problems affect people at any age. Young children can have vision problems. An example is amblyopia, or what we call 'lazy eye.' This is also a condition that can be treated if caught early. However, older people have a greater chance of developing vision problems and eye diseases. Some vision problems are a normal part of aging, like having trouble reading small print in a newspaper, and those can be corrected with glasses. However, many vision problems are caused by serious age-related eye diseases.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are some common symptoms of vision problems in older adults?

[Dr. Saaddine] Common symptoms could be decreased vision, difficulty driving at night, difficulty seeing the billboard, or if you see flashes of light or floaters, which are tiny specks that appear to float before your eyes. However, many of the serious eye diseases don't have early symptoms, and that's why you need to see your eye doctor.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often should we get an eye exam?

[Dr. Saaddine] How often you have an eye exam depends on your age, your family history of eye problems, and health conditions that increase the chance of developing an eye disease or vision loss. For example, people with diabetes should have an annual comprehensive dilated-eye exam to detect diabetic retinopathy at an early stage. Doctors recommend also routine eye exam at least once every two years for people 65 years of age and older.

[Dr. Gaynes] What's involved in a typical visit to an eye doctor?

[Dr. Saaddine] In a comprehensive eye exam, an eye care professional checks your eyes to look for common vision problems and eye diseases. It is a painless, harmless exam. The eye doctor will put a drop in your eyes that will widen, or dilate, your pupils to allow more light to enter the eye – the same way an open door lets more light into a dark room. This process offers a good look at the back of your eye to check for signs of damage and other problems, such as diabetic retinopathy or age-related macular degeneration. Your close-up vision may stay blurry for a few hours after the exam.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jinan, where can listeners get more information about vision problems and eye health?

[Dr. Saaddine] They can visit our website at cdc.gov/visionhealth, one word.

[Dr. Gaynes] Thanks, Jinan. I've been talking today with CDC's Dr. Jinan Saaddine about the importance of regular eye exams.

Remember, early detection and treatment are important for maintaining or improving vision, and a regular dilated-eye exam can help discover or prevent eye disease. If you haven't had your vision checked recently, contact an eye doctor for an appointment soon.

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.