



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Seeing Straight

Healthy Vision Month — May 2012

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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.

Many people don't have their eyes checked until they have trouble seeing. As a result, millions of Americans have undiagnosed problems with their eyes.

Dr. Xinzhi Zhang is a researcher with CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. He's joining us today to discuss the importance of having regular eye exams. Welcome to the show, Xinzhi.

[Dr. Zhang] Thanks, Bob.

[Dr. Gaynes] Xinzhi, what are the most common vision problems that people have?

[Dr. Zhang] The most common vision problems are nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, and 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 cataracts, macular degeneration, glaucoma, and diabetic retinopathy. They will lead to loss of vision, even blindness, if not detected and treated early.

[Dr. Gaynes] Do vision problems occur mostly in older persons?

[Dr. Zhang] Vision problems affect people at any age; 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 serious vision problems are caused by age-related eye diseases, such as cataract, glaucoma, macular degeneration, and diabetic retinopathy, which occur most often after the age of 40.

Young children also can have vision problems. An example is amblyopia, also called "lazy eye." The good news is it can be treated easily if caught early.

[Dr. Gaynes] What impact does impaired vision have on a person's life?

[Dr. Zhang] Vision loss affects your ability to drive, read, learn, exercise, or take care of yourself. Vision loss causes isolation from other people, family stress, and a greater chance of falls and the resulting injuries, such as hip fractures. And children who don't see well can have problems learning in school.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often should we have our eyes checked?

[Dr. Zhang] How often you have an eye exam depends on your age, your family history of eye problems, and conditions that increase the chance you will develop an eye disease or vision loss. For example, people with diabetes should have an annual dilated eye exam. Most professional organizations recommend routine eye exams at least once every two years for those with age-related eye diseases. Children who are three to five years old should get their eyes checked to see whether they have lazy eye or other problems, and get treated if they do.

In addition, you need to visit an eye care professional if you have decreased vision, eye pain, or if you see flashes of light or floaters, which are tiny specks that appear to float before your eyes.

[Dr. Gaynes] Xinzhi, what is involved in the typical eye exam?

[Dr. Zhang] In a comprehensive eye exam, an eye care professional checks your eyes to look for common vision problems and eye diseases. It doesn't hurt. They will put drops 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 the eyes to check for signs of damage and other problems, such as age-related macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. Your close-up vision may stay blurry for a few hours after the exam.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about impaired vision?

[Dr. Zhang] Please visit our CDC website, at www.cdc.gov/visionhealth for more information.

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

Remember, early detection and treatment of eye problems can prevent or delay impaired vision. Getting regular dilated eye exams can help ensure healthy vision for a lifetime.

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.