



A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

Keep an Eye on Your Vision

Healthy Vision Month — United States, 2010

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[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC — safer, healthier people.

[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 words in the newspaper are getting a little blurry or you're having trouble reading a billboard, chances are you need to have your eyes examined. Your problem may be corrected with contact lenses or glasses, but you might have a more serious condition.

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 having regular eye exams. Welcome to the show, Jinan.

[Dr. Saaddine] Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jinan, is vision impairment mostly a problem among older people?

[Dr. Saaddine] Although vision problems are very common among older people, vision impairment could happen at any age, from childhood to adolescence to adult years to older population.

[Dr. Gaynes] Can a person tell whether their vision problems are related to age or something more serious?

[Dr. Saaddine] It is hard to tell and sometimes older people will have the tendency to blame things on older age. Many major eye diseases don't have early warning signs and that's why a comprehensive eye exam is important, because that's the only way you can detect serious eye diseases.

[Dr. Gaynes] Can people do anything to protect their vision or delay the onset of vision loss?

[Dr. Saaddine] There are many things that people can do to delay vision loss or protect their eyes. They can eat healthy, they can stay active, maintain healthy weight, stop smoking or don't start smoking if they don't smoke, decrease exposure to the sun, know their family history, and wear protective eyewear. But the most important thing is really to have a comprehensive eye exam, as recommended by their eye care provider.

[Dr. Gaynes] How often should people have their eyes examined?

[Dr. Saaddine] The frequency of eye exam depends on the age of the person, the family history, and if they have other diseases. For example, diabetes is a huge epidemic now in the U.S. and worldwide. Diabetes is the leading cause of blindness in the United States, so people with diabetes, they have to have a comprehensive eye exam at least once a year.

[Dr. Gaynes] What does a comprehensive eye exam include?

[Dr. Saaddine] Comprehensive eye exam includes examining every part of the eye – from the eye movement to the reaction of the pupil to the light to examining all the anterior part of the eye, and the eye care provider also will put a drop in the eye to widen the pupil, or dilate the pupil, so they can see the back of the eye – the retina – and the optic nerve - which is the nerve that transmit messages from the eye to the brain.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jinan, what procedures are available to improve a person's vision?

[Dr. Saaddine] The good news is, most vision problems are related to refractive errors. Our eye is like a camera, and when this camera is out of focus, this is refractive errors, such as, near sightedness or myopia, far sightedness, astigmatism, and for these refractive errors, we can easily correct them by contact lenses or eyeglasses. For other eye diseases, the procedures can vary from eye drops to surgery.

[Dr. Gaynes] Where can listeners get more information about eye health?

[Dr. Saaddine] They can go to www.cdc.gov/visionhealth, one word.

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

Remember, eye diseases, such as diabetic retinopathy, cataracts, and glaucoma can cause vision loss and even blindness. Early detection and timely treatment can delay progression and improve your vision. Schedule an eye exam soon and make it a regular part of your healthcare routine.

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, 24/7.