



## A CUP OF HEALTH WITH CDC

### *Check Out Those Eyes*

*Healthy Vision Month — May 2011*

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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.

Opening our eyes each morning to see the world around us is something we often take for granted. But vision problems can impact all areas of our lives, impairing the ability to engage in basic tasks, such as reading, taking a walk, or driving a car.

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

[Dr. Saaddine] Thanks for having me.

[Dr. Gaynes] Jinan, how many people in the US have vision problems?

[Dr. Saaddine] There are approximately about 14 million individuals 12 years and older with visual impairment, but mind you, about 80 percent of those people could be just corrected by regular glasses.

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

[Dr. Saaddine] Vision problems affect all ages. For example, it affects children and recently there was a recommendation to screen children between three and five to detect vision problems. However, vision problems really hit hard in the aging population. The older we get, the more problems we have. And some vision problems are [a] normal part of aging, like difficulty seeing small print or reading [the] newspaper, and this is easily corrected by glasses. However, there are more serious vision problems and eye diseases, such as diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, cataracts, and age-related macular degeneration.

[Dr. Gaynes] What are the early symptoms of eye disease?

[Dr. Saaddine] Usually, the early symptoms could be blurry vision, difficulty reading, hard to see the billboard, difficulty driving at night. But the major eye diseases have really no early signs. For example, half of the people who have glaucoma don't even know that they have the disease.

[Dr. Gaynes] Is there anything we can do to prevent eye disease?

[Dr. Saaddine] There are several things that we can do. First of all, every person has to know their family history, their risk factors; you can eat right. Eat, for example, leafy green[s] like kale, spinach, fish, all kinds of antioxidants that could help in delaying and the progression of age-related macular degeneration. Keeping a healthy weight and exercising can stop, you know, and prevent diabetes which is the major cause of blindness. Wear sunglasses to decrease the exposure of the sun. All these are preventive practices for good vision health. But the most important thing is to have a comprehensive eye exam, as recommended by your eye care professional.

[Dr. Gaynes] If someone is having vision problems, is there anything they can do to improve their vision?

[Dr. Saaddine] If they have vision problems, there are, you know, several procedures that range from just simple correction with glasses or contact lenses or medication or could be an injection, for example the injection for the age-related macular degeneration now that is helpful, and could be laser surgery or surgery to remove cataracts.

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

[Dr. Saaddine] Frequency of eye exams really differ by age, by family history, by risk factor, but as I mentioned before, for example, children, at age three to five, they should have a vision screening to detect vision problems. People with diabetes. Diabetes now is an epidemic in the US, worldwide. It's the major cause of blindness among working age groups; people with diabetes have to have a comprehensive eye exam every year. Another example, people 65 years and older. They should at least have an eye exam every two years.

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

[Dr. Saaddine] They can go to [www.cdc.gov/visionhealth](http://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 vision checkups.

Remember - early detection and timely treatment of vision problems can delay the onset of eye disease and help prevent vision loss. If you haven't had your eyes checked recently by a professional, make an appointment today.

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](http://www.cdc.gov) or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.