Eye exams are important for more than your vision

They can also be good for your overall health

Even if you can see well, regular eye exams help keep your eyes healthy and catch other health conditions early. Eye exams can help find signs of conditions, such as:[1]

- Glaucoma — pressure in the eye, which can harm the optic nerve.
- Macular degeneration — changes in the retina that result in the slow loss of eyesight.
- Cataracts — clouding of the eye lens, which can blur vision.
- Diabetes.[2]
- High blood pressure.[2]
- Certain cancers.[2]

Finding these conditions early on means they can be treated sooner, which can improve health and lower health care costs.

Vision by the numbers

- Over 75% of Americans use some form of eyesight correction, such as glasses or contact lenses.[3]
- Among Americans over age 40:
  - 1 in 28 have eye conditions that can lead to vision loss or blindness. Experts say that number will go up as people age.[4]
  - More than 4.2 million are legally blind. The leading causes of blindness are primarily age-related eye diseases.[5]

The effect of diabetes on your eyes

One in four people with diabetes don't know they have it,[6] so they don't receive the treatment and protection they need. **Sixty percent of people with diabetes** also don't receive a yearly eye exam,[7] putting their vision at risk.

Diabetes can also make your eyes sensitive to light and damage the retina, which is called diabetic retinopathy.

Proper vision care, however, can stop more than 90% of vision loss and blindness caused by diabetic retinopathy, making regular eye exams even more important for people with diabetes.[8]

3 things you can do for your eyes

1. **Have a complete eye exam every year.** This may include dilation, where the pupil is dilated, or made bigger, so the retina can be checked for signs of eye disease and other health conditions.

2. **Protect your eyes from harmful UV rays.** Over time, the sun's UV rays can damage eyesight through cataracts and age-related macular degeneration. Wear sunglasses that block 100% of UV rays, even on cloudy days.

3. **Shield your eyes from everyday bright light and glare.** They can make it harder to see and end up straining and tiring your eyes. If you wear glasses, choose lenses that automatically adjust the tint based on the light around you. You can also move lamps, TVs, and computer screens around to reduce glare.

Eye exams can be just as important for your overall health as they are for the health of your eyes, so be sure to schedule one every year.

Would you like to know more about protecting your eyes?

Talk to your eye doctor about this and other vision topics.

1 National Eye Institute: nei.nih.gov.
2 Your Sight Matters: *7 Health Problems Eye Exams Can Detect* (accessed August 2020): yoursightmatters.com.
3 Glasses Crafter: *What Percentage of the Population Wears Glasses* (accessed August 2020): glasscrafter.com.
4 The Vision Council: *Vision Loss in America — Aging and Low Vision* (accessed August 2020): thevisioncouncil.org/sites/default/files/VC_LowVision_Report2015.pdf.
5 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Common Eye Disorders and Diseases* (accessed August 2020): cdc.gov.
6 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *More than 29 million Americans have diabetes; 1 in 4 doesn't know* (accessed November 2020): cdc.gov.
7 American Academy of Ophthalmology: *Sixty Percent of Americans with Diabetes Skip Annual Sight-Saving Exams* (accessed November 2020): aao.org.
8 The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *Keep an Eye on Your Vision Health* (accessed August 2020): cdc.gov.