

20/20

Eight simple ways to boost your eye-Q.

BY CELIA SHATZMAN

Seventy-six percent of Americans say their vision is their most important sense, but 42% admit they take it for granted. While genes are largely responsible for quality of sight, your actions are key to keeping your eyes healthy.



wise eyes

With some simple lifestyle changes, you'll preserve your eyesight well into the future.

Hit the gym. Working out isn't just good for your figure—it can also save your sight. People who exercise at least three times a week lower their risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) by up to 70%, according to a new study published in the *British Journal of Ophthalmology*. Physical activity improves blood circulation, which boosts oxygen to the eyes, reduces inflammation and aids in the removal of toxins—all of which help to prevent AMD, the leading cause of severe vision loss in people over 60.

Call it quits. "Smoking leads to undeniable damage, constricting blood vessels throughout the body, including the eyes," says Michael Pier, O.D., director of professional relations, Bausch + Lomb Vision Care. "Over time, smokers seriously harm their optic nerves and up their odds of developing AMD."

Eat smart. The best food for your eyes:

- Carrots, milk, cheese, egg yolk and liver are chock-full of vitamin A, which keeps eyes moist and wards off infection.
- Kale, spinach and broccoli contain lutein, an antioxidant that helps us discern contrast and color.
- Fish, nuts and olive oil are rich in omega-3 fatty acids that lower the risk for AMD and counteract dry eyes.

See the doc. Fifty-four percent of adults who don't wear glasses or contact lenses haven't seen an eye doctor in the past year. "Even if you don't have cavities, you still need to go to the dentist," says Dr. Pier. Similarly, you should regularly visit an optometrist or ophthalmologist, who can detect early signs of eye diseases and even conditions like diabetes before other symptoms appear. Patients with glasses or contacts, children and seniors should get annual checkups; others should schedule an appointment every other year.

Be shady. Yet another reason to avoid the sun: Frequent exposure to ultraviolet rays increases your risk for cataracts and melanoma on the eyelids. Sport sunglasses with 100% UVA and UVB protection. To shield you from peripheral rays, choose ones with a wrap design or wear a brimmed hat.

Take a multi. Look for a supplement with antioxidants, lutein and zinc. A Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine study found that these nutrients reduce the risk of developing AMD by about 25%.



contact solution

Nearly 40 million Americans use contacts, but they don't all care for them properly. "Standard steps help maintain healthy eyes and keep vision sharp," says Dr. Pier.

- Always wash hands before handling lenses. Avoid moisturizing and scented soaps so there's nothing left on your skin that can be transferred to your lenses. Dry hands with a lint-free towel.
- Before putting in your contacts, rinse them with solution and inspect for debris and tears along the edges.
- To prevent contamination, do not touch the nozzle of the contact cleaner bottle with your hands or allow it to touch any surface, and always put the cap back on.
- After inserting lenses, rinse out the case and leave it open to air-dry to prevent bacteria from accumulating.
- When removing a lens for overnight storage, put it in the palm of your hand and gently rub with solution for three to five seconds. Then rinse away debris to reduce the risk of infection or inflammation.
- Once the lenses are clean, store them in a case with fresh disinfecting solution. (Never mix new solution with old solution.)
- Replace case every three months.
- Whether you are supposed to dispose of your contacts daily, weekly, monthly or longer, never wear them for more time than prescribed. Eventually protein and lipid deposits build up, which can lead to infections.



digital damage

American kids consume on average seven and a half hours of electronic media daily. All that screen time can lead to digital eyestrain, a condition that's being diagnosed in more children every year. People of all ages should follow our tips.

Bat an eye: We tend to blink two to three times less when we're staring at a screen than when we're not. Make a point of blinking often to prevent fatigue and dryness.

Apply the 20/20/20 rule: If you're using a device for long periods of time, rest every 20 minutes by staring at an object that's 20 feet away for 20 seconds.

Lighten up: Illuminate your space with a small desk lamp and close the blinds. The bright light from overhead fixtures and windows can increase glare and blur your vision.

—Megan Bingham

