

## It's very wise to take care of your eyes

By Teddi Dineley Johnson

**Y**our eyes are your windows to the world, but just as windows need continual care to keep your view in clear focus, so do your eyes.

"We have only one set of eyes, and we have to protect both of them," says Melvin Shipp, OD, DrPH, MPH, dean of the College of Optometry at Ohio State University.

Vision is extremely important for our quality of life, for acquiring education and for performing our jobs, but it is one of the senses that many people take for granted, Shipp says.

Start focusing today on the healthy behaviors that will keep your peepers operating at peak performance. If you haven't had an eye examination within the last few years, make it your goal today to set up an appointment with an eye care professional, as many common eye conditions are without symptoms.

"You need to have a comprehensive, dilated eye exam to make sure you are seeing your best, and that your eyes are healthy," says Neyal Ammary-Risch, MPH, CHES, deputy director of the National Eye Health Education Program at the National Eye Institute.

Many common eye diseases, such as glaucoma and diabetic eye disease, often have no symptoms, but an eye care professional can detect these diseases in their early stages, "and early detection is very important for timely treatment," Ammary-Risch says.

Dilation of the pupils allows eye care professionals to examine the back of the eye and is a painless procedure, she adds.

### Show respect: Get checked

The American Optometric Association recommends that adults ages 18 to 60 have an eye exam at least every two years, but depending on your risk factors for eye disease, you may need them more frequently. Annual eye exams are recommended after age 60, when people are at increased risk for age-related eye diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic eye disease or cataracts.

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>> For more eye health tips, visit [www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes](http://www.nei.nih.gov/healthyeyes)

Children should also have regular eye exams, including infants. During the first year of life, all children should have their eyes examined by their pediatrician or health care professional to determine healthy development of vision.

### Peepers should be keepers

Eye injuries often occur at work, during recreational activities and while performing routine household chores.

According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, about 2,000 U.S. workers suffer job-related eye injuries that require medical treatment each day. Wearing protective eye gear — such as goggles, face shields and safety glasses — can reduce the severity of these injuries or even prevent up to 90 percent of them. Ask your eye care professional for advice on selecting the right protection for each purpose.

Eye care professionals also recommend that sports participants of all ages, from young children on up, wear protective eye gear to guard against wayward balls, cleats, sticks, rackets, bats and elbows. For help choosing the proper gear, visit the National Eye Institute's Web site at [www.nei.nih.gov/sports](http://www.nei.nih.gov/sports).

It's also important to wear protective eye-wear when doing work around your home. Activities such as trimming hedges and mowing the lawn put you at risk for objects

flying into your eyes.

"Make sure you are wearing the appropriate protective eye wear for your activity," Ammary-Risch reminds.

### Fun in the sun

Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays can damage your eyes and contribute to the development of cataracts and diseases such as macular degeneration. Look for sunglasses — they don't have to be pricey — that block out 99 percent to 100 percent of both ultraviolet-A and ultraviolet-B radiation, and don't leave home without them.

A wide-brimmed hat can also help shield your eyes from direct sunlight.

"The risk of being overexposed to the sun cannot be fully appreciated," Shipp says.

### Stay clean with good hygiene

If you wear contact lenses, make sure to wash your hands with soap and water before putting them in or taking them out. Also, follow proper disinfection and storage procedures.

"Unfortunately, contact lens abuse is more common than it should be," Shipp says. "When patients become less diligent, they put themselves at risk for an eye infection or discomfort."

And if you use mascara or other cosmetics, remember to replace them every three months to six months to avoid eye infections.



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