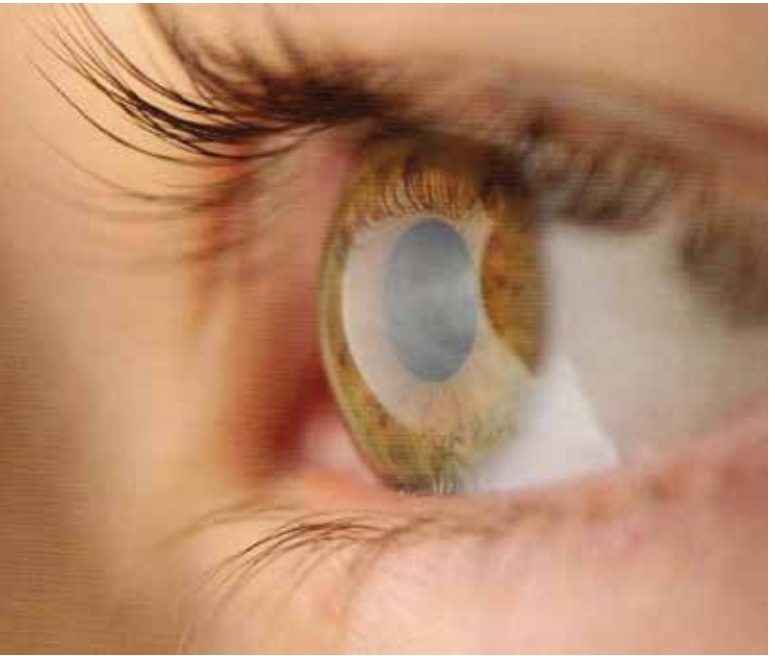# LOOKING OUT FOR YOUR EYES

TOP TIPS FOR A LIFETIME OF GOOD VISION

Eye health isn't always top of mind when our vision is functioning normally. But as we age, our eyes become more susceptible to diseases that can lead to vision impairment or loss. Some age-related eye diseases run in families and can't be entirely prevented, but following basic rules for eye health can ward off problems. Robert Filer, M.D., a Mills-Peninsula ophthalmologist and cataract surgeon, suggests the following tips to keep your eyes healthy for life.

Get Regular Eye Exams

Regular eye exams and screenings can catch not only eye disorders that can cause vision loss, but also many other types of diseases.

"Literally any disease that you can think of can show up in the eye," Dr. Filer says. "We look for and can spot diabetes, high blood pressure, multiple sclerosis, brain tumors, tuberculosis — we can see that all in the eye. Anything that causes pressure around the brain to increase is something we see in the optic nerve."

The two most common diseases that impact the eyes are age-related macular degeneration (ARMD) and glaucoma, and the risk of both increases with age. One-third of people over age 70 get some degree of ARMD, for example. Glaucoma can be sneaky because it attacks peripheral vision first, so by the time you notice symptoms you may have lost as much as 90 percent of your vision.

How often should you have your eyes checked? For optimal eye health, the American Academy of Ophthalmology recommends that all adults get a baseline eye exam by age 40. In addition, the Academy recommends annual exams for adults ages 65 and older.

If you have certain health conditions, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease, or a family history of glaucoma, Dr. Filer recommends annual eye exams, including dilation and retinal evaluation, starting at age 40.

"It is important to be seen and screened throughout your life," Dr. Filer says. "Eye exams can really make a big difference in catching disease."

Eat Colorfully

Leafy green vegetables, such as kale and spinach, and berries and other colorful fruits contain lutein, a naturally occurring dietary pigment that has a protective effect on eye health and can help ward off macular degeneration.

Also readily available over the counter are antioxidant multivitamin blends specifically for eye health. Are supplements necessary or a good idea?

"Studies suggest that if you have macular degeneration, antioxidant vitamins can slow the progression of the disease," Dr. Filer says. "So if someone has macular degeneration, we do recommend they take vitamins for eye health. Preventive benefits of suppplments are not proven, so I recommend focusing on getting nutrients from your diet, but a multivitamin can't hurt."

Don't Smoke

"Smoking is a huge risk factor for developing age-related macular degeneration and makes the condition worse if you have it, not to mention the many other health problems related to smoking," Dr. Filer says.

Wear Protective Eye Gear and Sunglasses

"Sports and work injuries are completely preventable sources of vision loss and we still see people lose their vision this way," he says. Dr. Filer emphasizes the importance of wearing safety glasses at all times during construction work, woodworking and sports such as squash and racquetball.

Ultraviolet light from the sun is a contributing factor in macular degeneration and cataracts, so always wear sunglasses with UVA and UVB protection while in the sun. hp

ROBERT FILER, M.D.