

Tips for healthy ears and eyes

Keys to better hearing and vision throughout your lifetime



A UnitedHealthcare Company

Hearing loss happens for many reasons. Some people lose their hearing slowly as they age. Doctors do not know why, but it seems to run in families.

The ear infection otitis media can lead to long-term hearing loss if it is not treated. And hearing loss can result from taking certain medications.

"Ototoxic" medications may damage the inner ear, sometimes permanently. Even aspirin at some dosages can cause temporary problems. Check with your doctor if you notice a problem while taking a medication.

AVOID LOUD NOISE

One of the most common causes of hearing loss is loud noise. Loud noise can permanently damage the inner ear. It also may contribute to a ringing, roaring, clicking, hissing, or buzzing sound in the ears.

About 15 percent (26 million) of Americans between the ages of 20 and 69 have high-frequency hearing loss due to exposure to loud sounds or noise at work or in leisure activities.

Noise-induced hearing loss is preventable. You can protect your hearing by avoiding noises at or above 85 decibels in loudness, which can damage your inner ear.

These include gas lawnmowers, snowblowers, motorcycles, firecrackers and loud music.

- Lower the volume on personal stereo systems and televisions.
- When you are involved in a loud activity, wear earplugs or other hearing protective devices.
- Be sure to protect children's ears, too.

SEEK HELP

If you think you have a hearing problem, you should seek professional advice. There are several different types of professionals you can see about your hearing, including:

- Your primary care physician
- An otolaryngologist
- An audiologist
- A hearing aid specialist

Each has a different type of training and expertise. Each can be an important part of your hearing health care.

Turn over to learn more about maintaining your vision >>

DO YOU HAVE A HEARING PROBLEM?

- ✓ *Do you have a problem hearing on the telephone?*
- ✓ *Do you have trouble hearing when there is noise in the background?*
- ✓ *Is it hard to follow a conversation when two or more people talk at once?*
- ✓ *Do you have to strain to understand a conversation?*
- ✓ *Do you misunderstand what others are saying and respond inappropriately?*
- ✓ *Do you often ask people to repeat themselves?*
- ✓ *Do you have trouble understanding women and children when they talk?*
- ✓ *Do people complain that you turn the TV volume up too high?*
- ✓ *Do you hear a ringing, roaring, clicking, buzzing, or hissing sound a lot?*
- ✓ *Do some sounds seem too loud?*

Maintaining your vision

WEAR SUNGLASSES AND PROTECTIVE EYEWEAR

Sunglasses protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays. The best ones block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation. Sun exposure is associated with developing cataract and age-related macular degeneration.

Wear protective eyewear, such as goggles, safety glasses, shields and eye guards, when participating in sports or working with power tools. Most protective lenses are made of polycarbonate, which is 10 times stronger than other plastics.

DON'T SMOKE

Smoking increases the risk of developing age-related eye diseases, such as macular degeneration and cataracts, and can damage the optic nerve.

MAINTAIN A HEALTHY DIET AND WEIGHT

A diet rich in fruits and vegetables, particularly dark leafy vegetables, such as spinach, kale, or collard greens, can help to keep your eyes healthy. Research also shows there are eye health benefits from eating fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and halibut.

Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes. This raises your risk of diabetic retinopathy or glaucoma, which can lead to vision loss.

KNOW YOUR HISTORY AND RISK FACTORS

Family history is a strong risk factor for both age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and glaucoma – two diseases that become much more common with age.

As you get older, you are also at higher risk of developing cataracts or diabetic eye disease. Knowing your risk factors is important because you may be able to lower your risk by changing some behaviors.

STAY CLEAN

Always wash your hands thoroughly before putting in or taking out your contact lenses to avoid the risk of infection. Make sure to disinfect contacts as instructed and replace them on time.

GIVE YOUR EYES A REST

If you spend a lot of time at the computer or focusing on any one thing, you can forget to blink your eyes and your eyes can get tired. Try the 20-20-20 rule: Every 20 minutes, look away about 20 feet in front of you for 20 seconds. This can help reduce eyestrain.

HAVE YOUR EYES CHECKED REGULARLY

See an eye care professional – either an ophthalmologist or optometrist – on a regular basis. People over age 65 should have yearly dilated eye exams.



A UnitedHealthcare Company