

Focus on Healthier Eyes

You may be surprised to learn that much of the advice you hear about preventing heart disease, diabetes, cancer and lung disease also applies to protecting your vision.

The major causes of visual disability among U.S. adults include cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration (AMD). In addition to having periodic eye exams to help detect problems early, some of the best things you can do now to prevent or control eye diseases include:

- **Limit exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light.** It has been linked to increased risk for some kinds of cataracts. Wear sunglasses that offer UV protection and a hat with a brim to help block sunlight.
- **Quit smoking.** Smoking has been linked to AMD, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy.
- **Adopt a healthy lifestyle.** A healthy diet, regular exercise and weight control can help prevent or manage diabetes (and its related vision threats) and may reduce your risk for AMD.
- **Rein in high blood pressure.** Hypertension raises the risk for vision problems and loss from a number of causes. There is also a strong link between higher levels and diabetic retinopathy in people with type 2 diabetes.
- **Control your blood sugar if you have diabetes.** Very high blood sugar levels increase your risk for diabetic retinopathy. Diet, exercise, medication and other means can help you control your levels.
- **Keep blood lipids under control.** A blood test can determine the levels of cholesterol and other lipids (fat) in the bloodstream. In those with diabetes, high cholesterol may worsen the risk for diabetic retinopathy.

Your doctor can help you determine which risk factors you may need to address and create a doable plan for managing those risks.

Sources include American Heart Association, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *JAMA Ophthalmology* and the National Institutes of Health (National Eye Institute; National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute; National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases and U.S. National Library of Medicine).

