

Ten Simple Steps to Help Prevent Vision Loss

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Did you know that lifestyle choices like diet, exercise and smoking can also have an effect on your long term vision health?

A CNIB survey showed that less than half of Canadians believed that being a non-smoker had a major impact on their vision health. Similarly, just 39 per cent recognized the importance of exercise on eye health, and just 53 per cent understood the effect diet can have.

In reality, all of these things can have profound consequences on your vision health. Knowledge is power in the fight against vision loss.

Here are 10 simple things you can do to help protect your sight:

Have your eyes examined regularly by an eye-care professional, and don't ignore changes in your vision.

Serious eye conditions such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration (AMD) can be present in your eyes without any symptoms of eye disease. Other conditions, such as diabetic retinopathy, can progress rapidly if left untreated. Early detection is important to ensure prompt diagnosis and treatment.

You may have a higher risk of developing vision loss if you have a family history of eye disease, light-coloured eyes and skin, are diabetic, overweight, over age 50 or a smoker. Consult your eye doctor to determine what is best for you, depending on your age, family history, existing eye conditions and risk factors.

Quit smoking.

People who smoke are three to four times more likely to develop AMD, which is the number one cause of significant vision loss in people over 50 in Canada. Smokers are also at increased risk for developing cataracts. Quitting now can reduce the risk.

Eat healthy.

Healthy eating makes sense – for both our overall well-being and for our vision. Good nutrition for the eyes means a balance of vitamins, minerals, fats and other nutrients. Studies have shown that nutrients like omega-3 fatty acids, lutein, zinc, and vitamins C and E may help ward off age-related vision problems like macular degeneration and cataracts. Regularly eating these foods can help lead to good eye health:

- Green, leafy vegetables such as spinach, kale, and collards
- Salmon, tuna, and other oily fish
- Eggs, nuts, beans, and other non-meat protein sources
- Oranges and other citrus fruits or juices

Keep active.

Excess weight, a sedentary lifestyle and high blood pressure are all risk factors for AMD and diabetic retinopathy. Staying active helps you maintain a healthy weight, making you less likely to get obesity-related eye diseases.

Protect your eyes from sunlight.

Ultraviolet (UV) radiation is an invisible component of sunlight that is most commonly known to cause sunburns and skin cancers. UV damage can cause AMD, cataracts, retinal damage, skin cancer around the eye, and both cancerous and non-cancerous growths on the eye.

When buying sunglasses, check for 100 percent UV protection; make sure your sunglasses block 100 percent of UV-A rays and UV-B rays.

Wear eye protection.

When playing sports or working with power tools, protect your eyes with Canadian Standards Association-approved safety glasses or goggles. You don't need a prescription for them, and most hardware and sporting-goods stores carry a good selection.

Consider vitamin supplements.

If you are diagnosed with dry AMD, talk to your eye doctor about using a special formulation of high-dosage vitamin supplements that has been shown to be effective in lowering the risk of developing the advanced form of AMD.



Retired teacher Carole Spicer doesn't let vision loss due to age-related macular degeneration keep her from doing the things she loves. During an assesment with CNIB's Low Vision Specialist, Carole—an avid singer—learned a number of sight enhancement techinques to help her read the choir music she now has trouble seeing, as well as identify solutions for everyday tasks that had become a little more challenging since losing her sight.

Prevent/manage diabetes

Most people with diabetes are at a high risk of developing diabetic retinopathy and other vision problems – but most vision loss from diabetic retinopathy can be avoided. With routine eye examinations, diabetic retinopathy can be detected and treated. Without treatment and the proper care, the eye disease can advance to uncorrectable vision loss or even blindness, usually in both of your eyes.

If you are living with diabetes, you can reduce your risk of developing diabetic retinopathy by managing blood glucose levels, eating healthily, exercising and having regular eye exams.

Keeping drinking moderate

Lower the risk of developing cataracts, since heavy drinking of alcoholic beverages is a known risk factor.

Use an Amsler Grid

Catch wet AMD in the early stages, when it's much easier to treat. Wet AMD causes significant vision loss, usually very quickly. The Amsler Grid – a test you can easily do at home – is highly recommended if you are over 50, have a family history of AMD or have dry AMD (which often progresses to wet AMD): cnib.ca/amsler

Want to know how you're doing?

Take CNIB's Healthy Vision Checklist to see how you're doing when it comes to looking after your eyes: cnib.ca/checklist

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