May Is Healthy Vision Month

5/3/2012

Notice that last one? Yes, you guessed it, May (or Healthy Vision Month) is very near and dear to our hearts. It is so important, in fact, that we would like to give you all some things to think about in regards to the continued health of your eyes.

Healthy Vision Month is a national eye health observance established by the National Eye Institute (NEI) in May 2003. NEI is one of the National Institutes of Health, an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Healthy Vision Month is designed to elevate vision as a health priority for the Nation. Millions of people living in the United States have undetected vision problems, eye diseases, and conditions.

Having a comprehensive dilated eye exam is one of the best things you can do to make sure that you're seeing the best you can and that you're keeping your eyes healthy. Millions of people have problems with their vision every year. Some of these problems can cause permanent vision loss and even blindness, while others are common problems that can be easily corrected with glasses or contact lenses.

What is a comprehensive dilated eye exam?

A comprehensive dilated eye exam is a painless procedure in which an eye care professional examines your eyes to look for common vision problems and eye diseases, many of which have no early warning signs. Regular comprehensive eye exams can help you protect your sight and make sure that you are seeing your best.

What are common vision problems?

Some of the most common vision problems are uncorrected refractive errors. These include myopia (nearsightedness), hyperopia (farsightedness), astigmatism, and presbyopia.

What are age-related eye diseases and conditions?

As you age, you are at higher risk of developing age-related eye diseases and conditions. These include: age-related macular degeneration, cataract, diabetic eye disease, glaucoma, low vision and dry eye.

What can I do to keep my eyes healthy?

- **Have a comprehensive dilated eye exam.** You might think your vision is fine or that your eyes are healthy, but visiting your eye care professional for a comprehensive dilated eye exam is the only way to really be sure. When it comes to common vision problems, some people don't realize they could see better with glasses or contact lenses. In addition, many common eye diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic eye disease and age-related macular degeneration often have no warning signs. A dilated eye exam is the only way to detect these diseases in their early stages.
During a comprehensive dilated eye exam, your eye care professional places drops in your eyes to dilate, or widen, the pupil to allow more light to enter the eye the same way an open door lets more light into a dark room. This enables your eye care professional to get a good look at the back of the eyes and examine them for any signs of damage or disease. Your eye care professional is the only one who can determine if your eyes are healthy and if you're seeing your best.

- **Know your family's eye health history.** Talk to your family members about their eye health history. It's important to know if anyone has been diagnosed with a disease or condition since many are hereditary. This will help to determine if you are at higher risk for developing an eye disease or condition.

- **Eat right to protect your sight.** You've heard carrots are good for your eyes. But eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, particularly dark leafy greens such as spinach, kale, or collard greens is important for keeping your eyes healthy, too.[i] Research has also shown there are eye health benefits from eating fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, tuna, and halibut.

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight or obese increases your risk of developing diabetes and other systemic conditions, which can lead to vision loss, such as diabetic eye disease or glaucoma. If you are having trouble maintaining a healthy weight, talk to your doctor.

- **Wear protective eyewear.** Wear protective eyewear when playing sports or doing activities around the home. Protective eyewear includes safety glasses and goggles, safety shields, and eye guards specially designed to provide the correct protection for a certain activity. Most protective eyewear lenses are made of polycarbonate, which is 10 times stronger than

other plastics. Many eye care providers sell protective eyewear, as do some sporting goods stores.

- **Quit smoking or never start.** Smoking is as bad for your eyes as it is for the rest of your body. Research has linked smoking to an increased risk of developing age-related macular degeneration, cataract, and optic nerve damage, all of which can lead to blindness.
- **Be cool and wear your shades.** Sunglasses are a great fashion accessory, but their most important job is to protect your eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays. When purchasing sunglasses, look for ones that block out 99 to 100 percent of both UV-A and UV-B radiation.
- **Give your eyes a rest.** If you spend a lot of time at the computer or focusing on any one thing, you sometimes forget to blink and your eyes can get fatigued. 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.
- **Clean your hands and your contact lenses—properly.** To avoid the risk of infection, always wash your hands thoroughly before putting in or taking out your contact lenses. Make sure to disinfect contact lenses as instructed and replace them as appropriate.
- **Practice workplace eye safety.** Employers are required to provide a safe work environment. When protective eyewear is required as a part of your job, make a habit of wearing the appropriate type at all times and encourage your coworkers to do the same.