



## Ask A Health Care Professional Keep an Eye on Your Eyes

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Vision problems and eye diseases are often considered a normal part of the aging process, but they



don't have to be. Our risk of developing eye conditions and poor vision increases as we age, but we can diminish these changes by maintaining good health and getting regular eye exams.

### Why is vision screening important?

Regular vision screenings can lead to early disease intervention, may prevent or slow the progression of blindness, and can even detect other health conditions, such as hypertension and diabetes.

Studies have shown that when vision loss goes unchecked, a person can become accustomed to blurred vision over time, increasing the possibility of falls, accidents and unsafe driving. Regular eye exams inform us when our vision has changed, contributing to our overall health and wellness.

### Aging and eye disease

Problems with focus, called refractory eye problems, are a normal part of aging that can be corrected with glasses or lenses.

However, as we age, more severe eye conditions and diseases can develop, especially in adults older than 40. Nearly a million people in this age group are blind, and 6.5 million have some form of vision impairment. The number of adults who are blind and visually impaired is estimated to double by 2030 and triple by 2050.

The most common eye problem in adults over the age of 40 is a condition that affects the back of the eyes called diabetic

retinopathy. In this age group, one in three people with diabetes are at risk of developing this eye disease. Other age-related eye diseases that lead to vision impairment include cataracts (clouding of the lens), glaucoma (a condition that affects the optic nerve in the back of the eye) and macular degeneration (a breakdown of the light-sensitive tissue in the back of the eye).

smoking and second-hand smoke and to engage in daily physical activity. Consuming a nutritious diet that includes dark, leafy vegetables is essential as we age and can go a long way to protect our eye health. Adhere to dietary recommendations for the prevention of hypertension and diabetes, like the Dash Diet, which focuses on vegetables, fruits and whole grains.

Finally, be aware of your family history to understand what health issues you may be at risk for.

### Drive safely

Did you know that in 2022, adults over the age of 65



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### What can you do?

According to the American Academy of Ophthalmology, adults older than 65 should have an eye exam with an ophthalmologist every one or two years. A baseline exam is recommended at 40 years of age. Have your vision screened and your eyes examined regularly, and talk to your doctor about tools that can support your vision.

It is also important to avoid

constituted 17 percent of all fatal road accidents? If needed, wear corrective glasses or lenses while driving and be sure your prescription is current.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration offers guidelines for observing and adjusting to changes as we age so that we can stay safe on the road.

*If you have a health question that you would like to be considered in Ask a Health Care Professional, please email AskHealthcareProfessional@bcbsnm.com. BCBSNM will select questions that may appear. Questions will not be personally answered. The opinions expressed in this column are solely those of the author and not necessarily those of BCBSNM. This column is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical care.*