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Ten Ways to Preserve Your Vision

This month, I'll tell you my "top ten" ways to save your vision – this from my perspective as a practicing optometrist who has seen those who had suffered ocular misfortune.

1. If you have diabetes, take care of yourself and follow your doctor's recommendations. High blood sugar is very hard on the sensitive tissues of your eyes, and can produce damage, which is either difficult to or impossible to repair.
2. If you smoke, please quit. I know, we have all heard the various laundry list of smoking related damage. But, I must share with you that smoking has been associated with macular degeneration. This condition takes away one's reading and detail vision in a most heartbreaking way.
3. Eye protection is vital for eye-dangerous activities. Sawing, drilling, impact tools, compressed air, and a host of other enjoyable shop type activities can expose you to danger from flying particles and debris. Always wear protective eyewear with side protection. And, remember that those particles can still be extremely sneaky in getting past protective gear.

If you do happen to get an iron containing foreign particle on your eye, be sure and have it removed promptly. Ferrous particles begin to corrode in the salt water tear environment on your eye, and as this happens the rust will begin to poison the epithelial tissue on your eye surface. This "rust ring" inhibits healing and the longer the corrosive action the more difficult the rust ring removal.

4. Ultraviolet light is an increasing problem, and can produce cataract and other eye damage. If you are outdoors for an extended period of time, especially between the hours of 10:00 and 2:00, be sure to protect yourself with ultraviolet protective glasses (clear or tinted). Also, a brimmed hat may help. Remember that reflective surfaces such as water, sand, or snow can increase the UV risk substantially.

5. If you wear contact lenses, don't wear them too long. Although most soft contact lenses have FDA certification for overnight (extended wear) use, not everyone can and should wear contacts this long. Or, things may change and maybe you were able to achieve extended wear in earlier years but not now. Even when extended wear is deemed OK, most contact lenses are limited to seven nights of overnight wear before lens removal and cleaning.
6. Hand held fireworks account for many emergency room visits. I know that kids love to run with sparklers and watch their dramatic effects; but I cannot help but cringe when I think of children running with a white-hot metal stick emitting lots of hot sparks.
7. Don't ignore abnormalities such as missing vision, unusual floaters, or unusual flashes of light (especially seen peripherally). These sorts of things should be regarded as dangerous or sight-threatening until proven otherwise. They may be benign, but they could also be damaging retinal detachments. Also, visual loss combined with a painful temple area in the elderly could suggest temporal arteritis, a true emergency, which can be treated.
8. Many eye conditions have no symptoms, so you might have little or no warning that something is amiss until damage has already occurred. I recommend periodic eye examinations; ask your eye doctor how often you should be seen (it usually changes as one ages) and follow his or her recommendation.
9. If you have glaucoma, follow your doctor's recommendations. Usually, with glaucoma you don't feel or see anything wrong; yet you must have multiple tests on a periodic basis and usually use Rx eyedrops indefinitely. This makes it challenging to comply. But my advice is—comply. Have the tests, and use the drops if prescribed.
10. I believe that good health habits – those which foster a healthy heart – can foster healthy eyes. All of the standard advice with which we are so familiar – avoidance of excess calories, body weight, fats, and destructive substances – I believe can also help preserve good eye health.