The Aging Eye

Age-related eye diseases and conditions

Since your 40s, you have probably noticed that you needed glasses to see up close. You may have more trouble adjusting to glare or distinguishing some colors, particularly shades of blue and green.

These changes are a normal part of aging. They alone cannot stop you from enjoying an active lifestyle. They will not stop you from maintaining your independence. In fact, you can live an active life well into your golden years without ever experiencing severe vision loss.

But as you age, you should know you are at higher risk of developing age-related eye diseases and conditions.

What are these diseases?

These conditions affect different parts of the eye. If not caught early and treated, they can lead to vision loss and even blindness.

- **Age-related macular degeneration (AMD).** AMD is a common eye disease among people aged 60 and older. It gradually destroys the macula, the part of the eye that provides sharp, central vision

needed for seeing objects clearly. It comes in two forms: dry and wet. Each form requires different techniques to be used by eye care professionals to treat the condition.

- **Cataract.** Cataract is a clouding of the eye's lens and is common in older adults and people with diabetes. Vision loss by cataract is successfully restored with surgery. Although cataract surgery is one of the most common procedures performed in the United States today, some people never need it. Many others are able to postpone it for years.

- **Diabetic retinopathy.** Diabetic retinopathy is the most common condition among people with diabetes. It damages the blood vessels in the retina, usually in both eyes. If you have early-stage retinopathy, your eye care professional may suggest controlling

> **As you age, you are at higher risk of developing eye diseases.**

your blood sugar, blood pressure, and cholesterol to prevent the disease from getting worse. For the more advanced stage, you may need laser surgery.

- **Glaucoma.** Glaucoma is not just one disease. It is a group of diseases that are all caused by the same event; fluid in the eye builds up and damages the optic nerve. Your eye care professional can help control glaucoma by prescribing eyedrops or pills. Laser surgery is another way to open clogged areas so that the eye fluid drains and eases pressure against the optic nerve. Surgery is another option, but is used only when drops or laser surgery fails to control the pressure.

What is low vision?

People who have age-related eye disease are more likely to develop low vision. Low vision means that, even with regular glasses, contact lenses, medicine, and surgery, everyday tasks are difficult to do. Reading the mail, shopping, cooking, seeing the TV, and writing can seem challenging.

Fortunately, help is available. Low vision specialists can offer a variety of services that help people make the most of their remaining vision. They cannot, however, restore lost vision.

As a result, people with low vision can continue enjoying friends, family, hobbies, and other interests just as they always have. The key is knowing there is help.

Information and resources

The National Eye Institute (NEI) is part of the National Institutes of Health and the federal government's lead agency for vision research that leads to sight-saving treatments, and it plays a key role in reducing visual impairment and blindness. For more information, visit the NEI Website at www.nei.nih.gov.

Get a dilated eye exam.

If you are aged 50 or older, make a point of visiting your eye care professional annually. Having a dilated eye exam every year or as recommended by your eye care professional can help detect age-related eye diseases in their early stages. Early detection and treatment can help save your sight. So even if you are not experiencing vision problems, you should get an annual eye exam. This is one of the best things you can do to protect your sight. **For more information about age-related eye diseases and conditions, visit www.nei.nih.gov/agingeye.**