

Special Advertising Feature



VISION  
VISION

# QUEST

Looking for the right prescription for healthy vision?  
Check out the new eyewear technology.

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Health



"The doctor is ready to see you." It's a familiar-enough greeting, but one that not enough people are hearing these days from an eye doctor. Less than 50% of the country's adult population had an eye exam last year. That's a problem, because 12 million American adults have an uncorrected visual impairment of one sort or another.

As life expectancy increases and the cost of health care rises, it's apt to become an even bigger problem. Studies at leading medical centers continue to bring new solutions to conditions like age-related macular degeneration (AMD), and the world's top eyewear manufacturers are doing their bit to promote healthy vision. Still, all agree that the first step toward prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of eye disorders consists of regular visits to an eye-care practitioner.

Optometrist James N. Hess Jr., O.D., of Columbia Family Eye Care in Columbia, Md., recommends the first eye exam at six months of age, then at age 3, once a year between ages 5 and 18, and every other year between 18 and 40. It's back to once a year after 40 because many vision disorders are associated with advanced age. "I think most people go for exams when their insurance covers them, and for a long time that was every other year," he says. "If they have a condition that I feel needs to be monitored more often, I tell them."

Employers are getting the message. The percentage of large companies offering vision coverage rose to 66% in 2006, up from 52% in 2002 and 46% in 2000, according to a survey of employer-sponsored health plans by New York's Mercer Human Resource Consulting. That's good for the companies as well as their employees. The National Eye Institute (NEI), part of the federal government's National Institutes of Health, estimates that vision disorders account for approximately \$68 billion per year in direct and indirect costs.

#### ● VISION OF THE FUTURE

Age-related macular degeneration is the No. 1 eye-health topic these days. Last October the *New England Journal of Medicine* called the potentially blinding disease "epidemic in the developed world." Smoking, exposure to light, and inflammation are the primary risk factors for AMD, says the *Journal*, adding that "roughly one in three people will be affected to some degree by the age of 75 years."

Glaucoma, which affects two million Americans, is another leading cause of blindness, although research has produced treatments that slow its progression. Experts say another two million people are completely unaware that they have the disease.

Diabetics can lower their chance of vision loss if they are vigilant. According to Prevent Blindness

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America, a volunteer health and safety organization dedicated to fighting blindness and saving sight, that means controlling blood-sugar levels and visiting an eye doctor once a year. But more than four million Americans ages 40 and older already have some form of diabetic retinopathy, and the NEI says that number is expected to reach 6.1 million by 2020.

On the good-news front, diabetes is a disease that can actually be detected through an eye examination. In fact, an optometrist or ophthalmologist can discover all sorts of undiagnosed conditions. Dr. Hess, who refers “no less than one patient every couple of weeks” to his or her primary-care physician for high blood pressure, says he has also diagnosed everything from multiple sclerosis to a visual-field defect that led a neurologist to perform surgery on a patient’s pituitary gland.

“It’s important to get regular exams, so you’re aware of current and future problems with the health not just of your eyes but of your entire body,” says Stephanie De Long, editor in chief of *Eyecare Business*. “Unfortunately, it’s one of those well-kept secrets.”

### ● THE COMFORT ZONE

New breakthroughs by eyewear manufacturers are addressing both eye and body health. Essilor of America, which turns out some 200 million eyewear lenses every year, recently created a new generation of anti-reflective lenses. The Dallas company is best known for developing Varilux, the world’s first no-line bifocals. Its new Crizal products are created by an integrated eight-step manufacturing process that fuses two-sided scratch-resistant, anti-reflective, and water-repelling properties into the lens itself. For the consumer, that translates into lenses that block glare and resist dust and dirt. They also allow 99% of light through, which eliminates reflections and lets the wearer see more detail and sharper images.

“Crizal lenses have a number of health benefits, as well,” says Tom Thill, Crizal brand manager.

“One of the big safety aspects is reducing halos at night while driving. Crizal lenses also deal with glare, which creates eye fatigue. Your eyes get tired and you don’t concentrate as well, whether you’re driving or using a computer. By reducing glare, you improve your stress level and overall health.”

Austrian eyewear designer and manufacturer Silhouette launched its iconic rimless frames (whose minimalist design has no screws or hinges) seven years ago. These bestsellers are so flexible and lightweight that comfort becomes a cure in

itself. “Because Silhouette frames float on the face, people can wear them all day,” says Debra Severson, director of strategic programs and account support. “Other frames are often taken on and off, which can be fatiguing to the eye. In addition, our frames don’t slip down the nose, so vision is always perfect.”

In another area, Silhouette commissioned a research review on the link between blue light and macular degeneration. Dr. James Dillon, director of Columbia University’s Harkness Eye Institute’s photochemistry laboratory, scrutinized 30 years of studies and concluded that

blue light, beyond ultraviolet in the spectrum, does indeed have detrimental effects on eye health. A champion of holistic eye care, sight correction, and protection, Silhouette is spreading the word to doctors and consumers about its Ideal Protection lens, which blocks 97% of the troubling blue light. “Enough blue comes through so color recognition remains and eyes stay comfortable,” Severson adds.

Keeping eyes comfortable and safe, and having good overall health, increase the odds that eyes will stay healthy. Still, it’s clear to all that prevention through regular eye exams is the first step to healthy vision.

—Heidi Ernst

## A WORKOUT FOR VISIONARIES

Dry eyes affect some 30% to 40% of the adult population, according to *Eyecare Business* magazine. The main culprit? Computer use. To help reduce dryness and eye fatigue, try one or more of these exercises during long stints in front of your PC:

1. Look away from your screen every 30 minutes, and focus for five to ten seconds on a distant object. Then concentrate on a closer object for five to ten seconds. Move your focus back and forth between the two objects ten times.
2. Blink rapidly for a few seconds. Take frequent breaks. A ten-minute break every hour will help reduce eyestrain.
3. Stand up, move around, and exercise arms, legs, back, neck, and shoulders often.

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